

new zealand gardener

MARCH 2016

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HALLINAN**

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easy summer
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Volume 72 Issue 03

Published continuously since 1944
ISSN 0028-8136

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Audited circulation per issue 38,503*
Audited average issue readership 324,000**

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Freephone: 0800 624 744

Email: subs@nzgardener.co.nz

www.nzgardener.co.nz

1 year \$78.50/2 years \$145

Australia (1 year) \$95

AUSTRALIA ADVERTISING:

Ph: 1800 0 FFXNZ (1800 033 969) or 02 9282 1366

Email: bookfairfax@fairfaxmedia.co.nz

Printing: Webstar, New Zealand

* Source: NZ Audited Bureau of Circulation; Total Net Circulation;
July 15 - Sept 15 ** Source: Nielsen CMI Q4 2014 - Q3 2015

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*'People think
computers will
keep them from
making mistakes.
They're wrong. With
computers you make
mistakes faster'*

Adam Osborne



Forgive me for wildly misquoting T. S. Eliot, but the naming of plants is a difficult matter. Not the giving of names in the first instance, you understand. (Carl Linnaeus invented a proper system of binomial nomenclature in the 18th century and that side of things has proceeded pretty smoothly since then.) I mean remembering the name of a particular plant when you come across it unexpectedly.

You may wonder how often one is asked to identify a plant at a moment's notice, but I can assure you as the editor of a gardening magazine it happens with terrifying regularity. Around 50 per cent of the emails we get have as the subject line a variation on: 'What plant is this?' And these queries don't just come via email and post. Every time I speak at a garden centre or festival some lurking stranger jumps out of the shrubbery to produce a few mysterious leaves from their pocket and proffers them with a hopeful expression.

Alas, their hope is frequently misguided. Even if I know the plant, there is no guarantee I will remember the name in either a time frame or a context that is useful to the person who is inquiring. (Usually if I am going to remember the name it comes back to me two days later, in the middle of the night or in the bath, and even the most persistent of horticultural interrogators has given up by then.)

Of course I admire those gardeners who are good at remembering plant names, those cheerful souls who can rattle off the genus and variety and six useful tips about its growing habit before you can blink. I am simply not of their number. In my garden I have my own personal classification system, which means that when you show me a plant I am likely to identify it as "that little blue thing that climbs a bit if you let it" or perhaps the "pretty fragrant pink which that nice lady in Hamilton gave me as a cutting once". This system is crystal-clear to me, but I do admit it is less useful than Linnaeus's one when it comes to conveying information about plants to other people.

It is not just plants in other people's gardens that I can struggle to recognise on cue. There are plenty in my own that are an object of mystery to me. I know in general what they are of course – for the most part, I planted them. But if you ask me for the specific variety I am quite often stumped. Want to know what that spectacular dahlia or especially toothsome tomato variety is? Join the club.

Now, before you rush to your keyboards to gently upbraid me for not keeping proper records, I can assure you that I *always* intend to record a complete description of what I plant where at the time of planting. But – alas – I also *always* assume I will remember what I have planted where until such a time as it is convenient to write it down. And sadly I do not.

What do you think? Does the knowledge of plant names make you a better gardener or help you enjoy gardening more? Or is gardening an act of doing rather than cataloguing? I'd be interested in your views.

Anyway I have been thinking about plant names this month because we got one wrong in the February issue. The fuchsia that my colleague Xanthe White was pictured with was not *Fuchsia magellanica* as we said but *Fuchsia boliviana*, and *Fuchsia boliviana* is of course a weedy thug and we do not encourage you to chat with it (or plant it). Humble apologies for that mistake, and thanks to the eagle-eyed plantsmen and women who let us know.

Have a great March everyone! And I hope you enjoy the recipe book that comes free with this issue... it's a collection of our favourite ways to preserve your summer harvests.

Jo

Jo McCarroll

Mailbox



CHICKENS ARE THE BEST!

I have had chickens since September and they're the best thing for the garden! I get eggs every day, they're as cheap as chips to feed and they eat weeds. I have them fenced off so they have full access to my compost bins. They keep them clean and love to forage especially when you add something new. The only vegetables they eat is spinach, which they get daily anyway. I have also added a hive after noticing there were no bees on my cherry or fruit trees. I live in a city and can't wait to taste the honey. I'm also looking forward to next spring and my fruit trees being pollinated.

Carol Harland, INVERCARGILL

FLOWER MYSTERY SOLVED

Thank you for your article on the Chatham Islands (February). I am now able to put a name to a plant I bought two years ago because I loved the foliage: *Aciphylla dieffenbachii*. Through your article I learnt that it was planted in the wrong place beside two fences and gets very little sun.

Still, it is in full flower and looking healthy. It seems to love our Southland weather – maybe our weather is changing?

Ray Button, INVERCARGILL

NEW USE FOR MOSQUITO NETS

I love seeing birds in the garden but we all know they can be a nuisance and steal fruit. My solution is to make a net cloche using sections of 13mm garden hose covered with mosquito netting. The cloches are very lightweight and can be made to any size. The straight sections can be made rigid by inserting bamboo canes. All the joiners are standard fittings and elbows, tees and cross pieces can be purchased from Bunnings. For the corners you need to join a modified tee to an elbow. Mosquito netting can be purchased from Spotlight and lasts two to three years in Hawke's Bay and probably longer elsewhere. I hold it on the frame with clothes pegs and store it when not in use. The frame can be held down with irrigation pegs.

Frank Hosegood, HAWKE'S BAY



CHECK OUT OUR KINDY'S FAB FIGS

Here at Mayfield Kindergarten we take great pride in our gardens. These are our amazing figs, which we are sharing with our families. They are huge and so yummy!

Kathryn Richards, BLENHEIM

TREES OF DISTINCTION

Margaret Barker always writes a well-researched column, but I question her claim that "Metrosideros are our most distinctive trees" (NZG January). Surely there are other contenders. Take the kowhai – perhaps *Sophora tetraptera* is the most "distinctive", flowering profusely in spring around Lake Taupo; *Sophora godleyi* also, appearing a bit later in the Rangitikei while *Sophora microphylla* is abundant on Banks Peninsula. Their yellow flowers attract bird life and red-green colour blind people alike; unlike the ratas they are not palatable to possums. *Metrosideros* are indeed magnificent where they can be grown but even there they are subject to extreme possum damage. If one tree had to be singled out I would select *Pseudopanax ferox*: it is truly unique – and distinctive.

Gordon Collier, TAUPO



ONE LITTLE DUCK CAME BACK

Years ago my late mother grew a duck plant (*Sutherlandia frutescens*) alongside swan plants in our Wairarapa farm garden. As a child I was fascinated by the puffy seed cases that formed every summer and enjoyed floating them in shallow dishes of water. Out of nostalgia, I once managed to obtain a few rare seeds which I carefully nurtured, only to have the sturdy little seedlings eaten to the ground overnight by some obnoxious pest. Back to square one, but no more seeds were to be had and I resigned myself to being duck plant-less. Then, several months ago, I noticed a strange little plant growing under our apple tree. Several times I nearly pulled it out but, out of sheer curiosity, let it grow. Eventually it reached about 150cm and seemed happy clambering through the apple, so I staked it and kept an eye on it in case it was some dire weed. Then in early summer buds started to appear along the branches, eventually bursting into a mass of bright scarlet blooms before developing into the familiar puffy seedpods. I had my duck plant! I now have hundreds of pods bursting with seeds so I can plant a forest of them if I wish, although the shrub itself can be a bit gangly and scruffy. However the flowers are pretty and cut branches of seedpods make an eye-catching floral arrangement. Goodness knows where my plant came from – I can only assume a bird kindly deposited a seed under our apple tree, or else somebody Up There had something to do with it. Thanks Mum!

Jacqui Martin, WAIHI



LIKE LYNDA, WE LIKE 'LISETA'

I studied Lynda Hallinan's article on potatoes in September and decided to plant 'Liseta', which she recommended. In the beginning of January with a house full of young adults to feed, I dug up one tuber and what a huge crop it produced – 2.9kg! The potatoes are all a good size, easy to clean and very tasty. When planting I follow a tip in your *Get Growing* ezine: dig a deep trench, put in the potatoes and cover with bought compost. This way you don't have to keep covering them, the crops are huge and they are harvested by scraping the compost aside with your hands.

Helen Hay, QUEENSTOWN

STAKES THAT REALLY LAST

Fed up with the quality of garden stakes on offer I decided to look for something stronger and longer-lasting. I turned to builders' reinforcing rod. Hardware firms are happy to cut them to length, they drive into the ground easily and stay firm. The rusty finish blends in with the garden but it pays to wrap it before you put it in the car – it does nothing for the look of the upholstery! With a few added every year I now have a permanent set of stakes for my dahlias, delphiniums and tomatoes.

Rosemary Wood, HASTINGS



A PLANT THAT GOES 'POP'

About three years ago I bought a very sick potted balloon flower at a much reduced price because of the picture on the label, not knowing then that it would be such a delight. Between each of the three flowerings it has died down completely before new shoots appear in spring, I sprinkle some blood and bone and top it up with fresh potting mix. Popping the hot air balloon-shaped buds is fun for children and they always want "more". I believe the platycodons come in other colours but as yet I haven't yielded to the temptation to buy more and I haven't tried to repot or divide the plant to share with others.

I intend trying to save seed from a couple of the last flowers to see if I can propagate them that way.

Delwyn White, HAMILTON

BIRD-FREE BLUEBERRY BUSHES

Since I bought a mosquito net a couple of years ago, I haven't had a problem protecting the blueberries from the birds. Insert a bamboo stake into the middle of the bush then attach the net to the top of the stake. Cut the hem to fit like a crinoline over the entire bush. This certainly keeps the birds away and is also very attractive.

Helen Whyte, NEW PLYMOUTH

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IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR SPECIAL PERENNIALS FOR YOUR GARDEN....

Kate Jury from Seaflowers Nursery supplies rare and unusual perennials via mail order to customers all over the country. Salvias are a specialty, and Kate has a personal collection of nearly 100 different species and cultivars. Rarely offered varieties such as *Salvia clevelandii*, *S. lanceolata*, and *S. sagittata* can sometimes be found on her list, alongside popular star performers such as *Salvia nemorosa* hybrids and *S. 'Waverly'*. seaflowersnursery.co.nz



GROW YOUR OWN














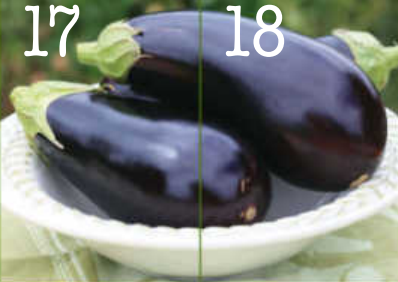






Crops to sow and plant now; ways with lavender;
edible abundance on Great Barrier; what to do about
wasps; plus your fruit & vege questions answered

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every month

WHAT TO SOW & PLANT

Gardening by the moon

Robert Guyton's guide to planting and sowing in harmony with the lunar cycle

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| COLOUR CODING KEY  Sow and plant  Cultivate only  Barren period  Sow root crops | 1  | 2  Last quarter <p>March begins at a time when sowing seed is least rewarding; sap run is low as is vitality, so seedlings started at this time are likely to bolt.</p> | 3 | 4 | 5  | 6 <p>Sow root crops on the 5th and 6th.</p> |
| 7  | 8 | 9  New moon 2.55pm | 10 | 11 | 12  | 13 |
| <p>If you use sprays in your garden, use them between March 7-11 for maximum effect. There's a fertile period just around the corner, so dig and cultivate your soil now to get it into perfect condition for sowing next week.</p> | | | | | | |
| 14 | 15 | 16  First quarter <p>March 12-20 is the first quarter phase and the best time to sow crops that produce leaves, flowers, fruits or shoots. Avoid pruning over this period as die-back is likely to result.</p> | 17  | 18 | 19  | 20 <p>Feed liquid fertiliser to established plants on the 20th and 21st.</p> |
| 21  | 22 | 23 | 24  Full moon 1.01am | 25 <p>Good Friday</p> | 26  | 27 <p>Easter Sunday</p> <p>On the 27th and 28th sow root crops and apply sprays.</p> |
| 28 <p>Easter Monday</p>  | 29 | 30 | 31 <p>The month ends in the same way it began, with a barren period of low sap run and vitality over several days.</p> |  <h1>March</h1> | | |

THIS MONTH...



Plug any gaps

• Summer crops will still be cropping.

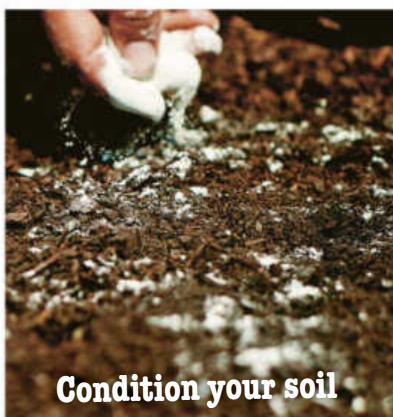
But no matter how warm it feels where you are, they'll all be over soon! As you pull out your tomatoes, peppers, beans and eggplants, fill any gaps with carrots, beetroot and radishes, which can all be sown direct now. Swedes and turnips can too if you live somewhere that offers a cold enough winter to sweeten them up. Otherwise, plant spinach or silverbeet seedlings, or the baby brassicas you started from seed when I suggested it two months ago – provided, that is, you also heeded my advice to protect them from cabbage whites! These rapacious butterflies will still be on the wing, so give those brassica seedlings some protection with a physical barrier such as a net curtain.

• Sow peas (and sweet peas) on St Pat's.

It's traditional to get your sweet peas in the ground on St Patrick's day and you might as well sow some peas while you're at it. They should make it through winter and reward you with a crop come spring (or even late winter in warmer places). You can sow broad beans from now until the end of April too. Like peas, broad beans are a nitrogen fixer, so they are a good option to grow in a bed where you've just grown leafy crops.

• Fill any other gaps with green crops.

A Canterbury study a few years ago found that green crops need to be sown as early as possible to maximise their effect on the soil. The type you use depends on what you've been growing and what you plan to grow. Mustard is a brassica, for instance, so don't use it as a green crop in a bed where you plan to grow cabbages and broccoli. Green crops keep down weeds, add organic matter to the soil, help retain water and can also be used to "sterilise" your soil to a degree if you've had a problem with a soil-dwelling pathogen – mustard and daikon radishes both have a natural biofumigant effect (although be aware they'll kill any good guys in the soil too). Daikon are a good choice if you want to break up compacted soil – leave them in the ground to rot and they'll leave behind the holes they have drilled.



Condition your soil

• Apply gypsum now to heavy clay soil.

This pH-neutral soil conditioner will help improve drainage and get more air into compacted soil. It won't work immediately, but applying it once a year for three years should make a difference. You can apply lime now too; unlike gypsum it does affect soil pH, so use it on acidic soils (with a pH less than 7) to sweeten them.

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Les and Bev Blackwell.
“Any and everybody
that comes here goes
away with something”



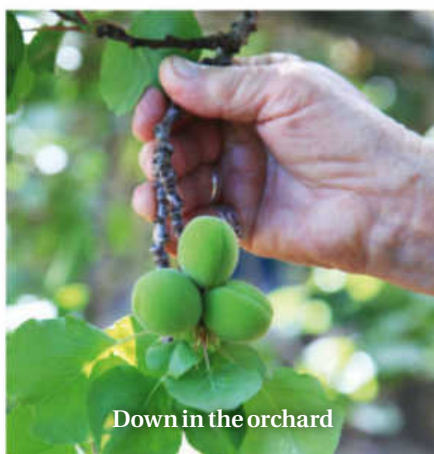
paradise found

Lifelong residents of this sparsely populated, isolated island, Les and Bev Blackwell are surely among the Barrier's greats

STORY: JO MCCARROLL PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG



Main crop spuds



Down in the orchard



Veges in the hill top garden

This page: The fenced hillside
vege garden. Opposite: some of
Bev's colourful pelargoniums





When Les started building the fenced garden on the hill, locals took a great interest. "So I told them, 'Keep it under your hat, but it's going to be a nudist colony'"

Les and Bev Blackwell have deep roots on Great Barrier, a 285km² island just 100km north-east of Auckland in the Hauraki Gulf. Les's (one-legged) great-great-grandfather George arrived here in 1865 and, one presumes, would have met Bev's great-great-grandfather, Benjamin Sanderson, who arrived here in 1863.

Born and raised on the Barrier, Les, now in his mid 80s, remembers the gardens the isolated island's residents used to have – the five Medland brothers, with huge veg patches on their farms along Medlands Valley; the paddock commandeered from Bev's family by the army to grow veges for the 1000-odd servicemen stationed on the Barrier during World War II, where the watermelons and pumpkins grew so rampantly they escaped over the fence and climbed up nearby trees.

"When my father took over the cream run [shipping the cream produced by the island's farmers to Auckland] he would have nothing but full cream cans to take over and empty cream cans to bring back," Les says. "There might be the odd box of groceries brought onto the island but nothing worth talking about."

But by the time Les took on a role as the island's carrier, responsible for collecting the imported goods and building materials and delivering them all over the Barrier, he found he was delivering boxes and boxes of fruit and veges that had been grown in Auckland to feed the island's residents.

"Crates of lettuces, bags of potatoes, onions and kumara, even pumpkins," Les says. "And I thought, 'Why are we importing these things from the mainland? We could grow them like our ancestors did.' So in 1995, when my knees gave out on me and I was forced to retire, I thought I'd start a garden and we could be self-sufficient."

It wasn't his first foray into homegrown produce. Years earlier Les had planted fruit trees in what the couple call the orchard, on the other side of the street. (Their property up from Kaitoke Beach is bisected by a public road.) A gardening expert had warned him that the area he planned to plant would be too swampy for fruit trees, so Les scraped out enough dirt, by hand with a garden hoe, to create 30-40cm high mounds in which to house his trees. "I must have shifted acres of dirt," he says.

Once the Blackwells decided to start growing vegetables too, they started a trial garden among the fruit trees. "Everything just grew madly," Bev says. "It was beyond our wildest dreams. We had so many watermelons that we put piles of them by the side of the road with a sign saying, 'Help yourself'."

After a few years, however, Les and Bev realised the orchard was too wet in winter for things to grow well, so Les decided to start another garden on the sandy hill across from the house (which, naturally, Les built himself) they've lived in over their 59-year marriage.

The hill garden now covers three-quarters of an acre: it's entirely fenced, to protect the crops from the exposed coastal situation, and divided into a dozen or so numbered compartments (so that Les can tell Bev where he'll be working and she'll know where to bring his cup of tea). Within it an astonishing range of edible crops flourish in an abundance that can barely be conveyed – suffice to say 850-odd people reside full-time on Great Barrier and you could be forgiven for thinking that Les and Bev wanted to feed all of them.

"The main thing people ask is why do you grow so much," Bev says. "Well, we like growing things and we give crates and crates away. There are so many needy people on the island, many with children."



A pumpkin bed in the bottom garden

Establishing the hill-top garden did not mean the lower garden would be neglected, of course. Apples, pears, apricots, feijoas, plums, kiwifruit, citrus, guavas, peaches, persimmons, passionfruit, quinces and avocados all grow there, along with main crops spuds, squash, kumara, tomatoes and more. There are two compartments in the hill garden devoted to tomatoes too: Les has 41 plants altogether – and Bev has a few more toms growing in her glasshouse, just in case. They grow 20-odd varieties, all ones that they know do well under the island's conditions: 'Capri', 'Brandywine Yellow', 'Brandywine Red', 'Black Krim' and 'Whopper' are all firm favourites.

“There’s been a lot of trial and error when it comes to our garden,” Bev says. “But I think we have just about got it worked out now”



Bev's garden by the road; Below: a few of her pelargoniums

Bev puts any excess tomatoes in a frying pan with some onions, garlic and vinegar and quickly cooks them before storing the resulting paste in her deep freeze. “It’s very good in the winter for casseroles,” she says. But she doesn’t freeze as much as you’d think – with no mains power on the island, the couple rely on a combination of solar and wind power, with a Rayburn wood stove used to heat the hot water in winter when there’s not enough sunshine to provide solar power. (In fact, they’ve only had 24-hour power in the house since 1995, when a wind turbine was installed.) “Running an extra freezer puts a bit more load on your power system,” she says.

She’s a keen bottler though: beetroot, chutneys, jams and whole fruit. “The family come with a chilly bin when they visit,” she says. “The apricot jam was very popular. They just have to bring the quart bottles and jars back.”

Bev gets into the garden too, growing flowers around the house and creating a traffic-stopping tapestry of colour on the hillside between the house and the road (cars often screech to a halt when it looks it’s best in spring, so the passengers can leap out to take a picture).

There are geraniums and pelargoniums there, some she bought, others that were given to her by friends and a pale pink one she took as a cutting from one near Shoal Bay Wharf that had been planted by her great-aunt. “Some did have names, but now I have no idea which is which.” There’s arctotis, poppies and daisies there too.



The Blackwells are strictly organic gardeners and the Barrier's isolation means they have to be pretty canny about making the best of what's available. Les goes over the fence to his brother's farm every April, and shuttles wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow full of cow pats back to enrich the sandy soil in the hill garden.

"I will dig out the top soil down to about 30cm and put that to one side, put half a dozen wheelbarrows full of cow manure in and then pile the topsoil back on."

He does this to half a dozen compartments one year and the rest the next. "I spend days doing nothing else."

Seaweed is another soil enhancer used here. Last Christmas Les and his eldest son carried numerous 10-litre buckets of it up to a wheelbarrow that they'd left on the edge of the soft sand, then took turns pushing the loaded wheelbarrow, 20 steps at a time. Some was dug in where the new potatoes grow, "so they had a good boost", some went into the compost.

Their gardening ancestors made a great deal of use of seaweed, Les says, "and I think that kept the bugs at bay. They never talked about anything getting blight."

"And they lived to a ripe old age too," Bev adds.

Three compartments are covered over with windbreak mesh, which provides a physical barrier against white butterflies and birds, and nature lends a helping hand sometimes too – the citrus in the orchard can be affected by sooty mould but Bev says one good storm and the salt spray blows it all away.

Sugar cane is used throughout the bottom garden as a fast-growing windbreak and, once chipped, as a mulch.

"A chappie who lived down the southern end of the island told me that sugar cane would be a good way to combat the wet in the orchard. He had a small plot at home so he sent his son back with three pieces."

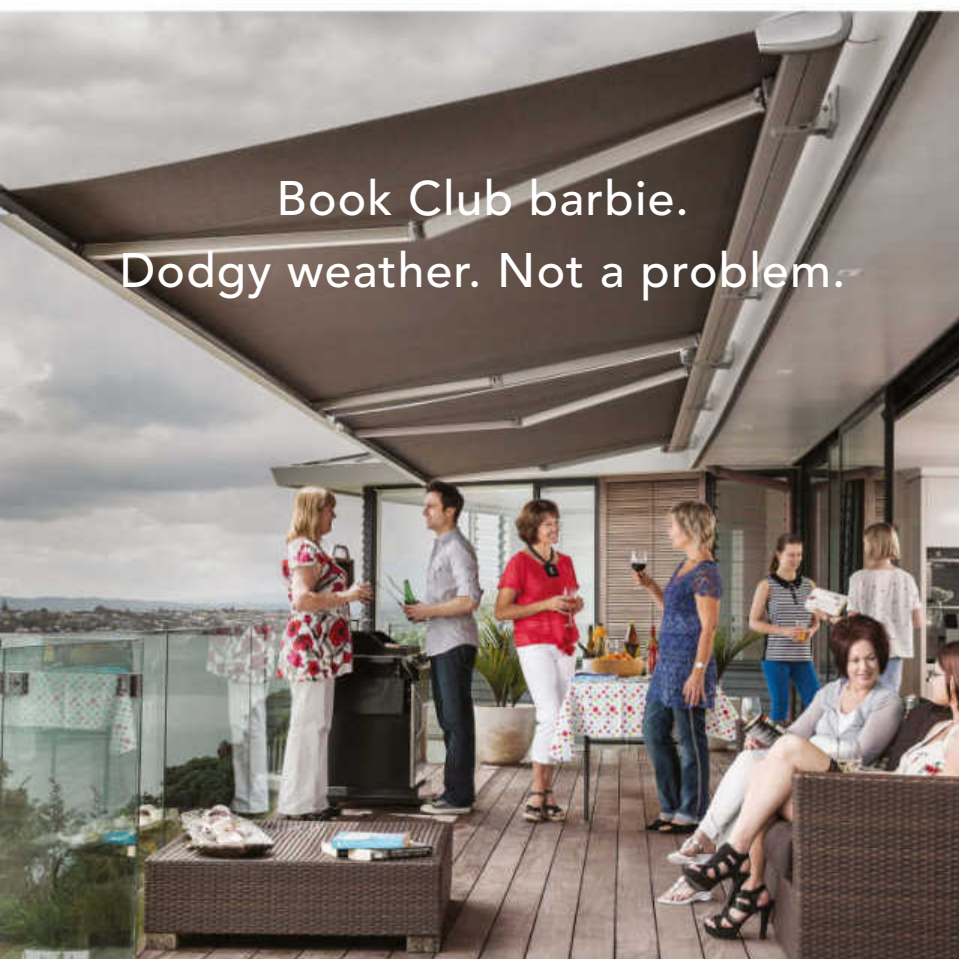
Les now grows it everywhere, and rates it highly. Once debarked (the chipper doesn't like the leaves) and run through the mulcher he layers it thickly on the beds to keep moisture in the soil and the weeds down. Any wood ash from the Rayburn gets saved too.

"I put a lot of it in the beds where I plan to grow my tomatoes. I am sure there is a lot of potash in it to give them a boost."

Newspaper is saved and layered four pages thick on the top of the beds, and the apple cartons from groceries delivered from the mainland are dismantled and used too with grass clippings piled on top.

But the healthy veges owe as much to careful attention as they do to soil amendment. "We keep a close eye on things," Bev says. "The other day I went over the silverbeet leaf by leaf to find out what was eating it."

"I think it's great that we decided to do something like this in our retirement," Bev adds. "We had a very busy life and when we retired people said Les won't cope with nothing to do. But the garden gives us plenty to do. There's been a lot of trial and error. But I think we have just about got it worked out now." ❀



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Heaven scent

Lavender is bee-friendly, beautiful and fragrant – but it also has a myriad of medicinal applications



*Lavender oil, especially that extracted from *Lavandula angustifolia*, is active against many species of bacteria and fungi*

Lavender has been used for thousands of years – as a healer of war wounds, as a perfume and aphrodisiac, to ward off disease and insects, treat headaches and hysteria, embalm corpses, clean homes and for flavouring food. In fact, the herb was so popular for everyday use that in *The English Physician* (1652), Culpeper wrote of it: “This is so well known, being an Inhabitant in almost every Garden, that it needeth no Description.”

He also understood its medicinal value. “Two spoonfuls of the distilled water of the flowers taken helpeth them that have lost their voice; as also the tremblings of the heart, and faintings and swoonings,” and that two drops of lavender oil could cure “either inward or outward griefs”.

He was right, at least for that last part. Modern science has shown that the essential oil, mostly found in the flowers, can alleviate stress and anxiety. A 2012 study on the effects of inhaling lavender oil on emotional states, autonomic nervous system, and brain electrical activity saw reduction in blood pressure, a more relaxed mental state and an increase in brain activities that are consistent with relaxation and better mood. A 2010 study of midlife women with insomnia showed that 20 minutes of lavender inhalation twice weekly for 12 weeks saw a reduction in heart rate and heart rate variability and improvement in sleep quality.

The herb is also reported to reduce pain. In a 1992 paper on “intensive aromacare”, foot massage with lavender oil on 100 patients in an intensive care unit reduced blood pressure, heart rate and pain. And the *Pakistan Journal of Biological Sciences* (2011) reported that lavender aromatherapy reduced pain after caesarean section or episiotomy.



Lavender oil, especially that extracted from *Lavandula angustifolia*, is active against many bacteria and fungi too. Roman soldiers carried it into battle to dress their wounds, and the oil was used during World War I to disinfect floors and walls.

More recently a number of studies have confirmed lavender oil’s ability to treat staph infections and MRSA.

The main constituents of lavender oil are linalool, linalyl acetate, 1,8-cineole, (E)-beta-ocimene, terpinen-4-ol, and camphor, with linalool and linalyl acetate the most important. Linalyl acetate (an ester) and linalool (an alcohol) both have a relaxant effect, among others.

Each of these constituents can vary significantly in oils derived from different species and cultivars, as well as from species and cultivars grown in different locations (due to climate, environment, altitude and country of origin). However, each type of lavender oil carries a similar chemical

make-up. *Lavandula angustifolia* has predominately esters and alcohols; *Lavandula stoechas* has predominately ketones; *Lavandula latifolia* has predominantly oxides, alcohols, followed by ketones and monoterpenes; and *Lavandula x intermedia* has mostly alcohols and esters. Hence, it’s the English lavenders (*Lavandula angustifolia*) and the lavindins (*Lavandula x intermedia*) that are most often used medicinally.

Lavandula latifolia has similar properties as *Lavandula angustifolia*, but because of its oxide content – which is stimulating and, in some cases, can be irritating – it’s much stronger. Its essential oil should be used sparingly.

Growing guide

In the garden, English lavender

(also known as true lavender and *Lavandula officinalis*) and *Lavandula x intermedia* are the most hardy of all lavenders. *Lavandula angustifolia* is native to the Pyrenees in southern France and north-east Spain, as well as Switzerland and Italy. Its cultivars flower before *Lavandula x intermedia*, usually in early summer. If they are cut immediately after flowering, a second flush may appear in autumn. Some well-known *angustifolia* cultivars include ‘Avice Hill’, ‘Foveaux Storm’, ‘Hidcote’, ‘Hidcote Pink’, ‘Loddon Blue’, ‘Miss Katherine’, ‘Munstead’ and ‘Thumbelina Leigh’.

If you want to use your lavenders for crafting, the *intermedia* types are ideal. For cooking, use *angustifolia* lavenders – they are sweeter in fragrance and have a low camphor content. Some varieties are sweeter than others too. I have heard mention that the English lavender ‘Melissa’ is perfect for cooking.

Lavenders need full sun and good drainage to grow well. They also grow



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VARIETIES

• ***Lavandula x intermedia*** is a sterile hybrid of *L. angustifolia* and *L. latifolia*, with long stems. It has a strong scent though is less sweet than English lavenders. I have 'Super' in my garden. Because of its high oil content it's one of the best for essential oil.

• ***Lavandula stoechas*** (aka French lavender) is hardy, flowering from late winter into summer. It has distinctive tufts of petal-like bracts that top each flower spike. Well-known cultivars include 'Avonview', 'Blueberry Ruffles', 'Major', 'Marshwood' and 'Pukehou'.

• ***Lavandula latifolia*** is a compact bush, flowering in late summer when spikes can reach over 1m. It has more of a camphory, menthol-like aroma.

• ***Lavandula dentata*** is common in gardens here, but needs protection from frosts. It is not as fragrant either, but the flower spikes are colourful. The plants flower year-round in warmer areas, so they make great hedges. The finely toothed leaves are a distinguishing feature of this plant.

RECIPES

Lavender-infused oil

If using fresh flowers, allow them to dry overnight to remove moisture. Fill a jar with fresh or dried flowers, then cover with almond or olive oil to 3cm from the top. Stir, screw on the lid, then place out of direct sunlight. Shake daily. After 4-6 weeks, strain. Pour the infused oil into a bottle and store in a cool, dark cupboard.

Lavender salve

This soothing salve is ideal for sores, cuts and inflamed skin.

Ingredients • 15g beeswax, grated
• 100ml lavender-infused oil • 10-20 drops of lavender essential oil

Heat beeswax and lavender oil in a double boiler on low until melted. Pour 1 tablespoon of mixture onto a saucer and place in freezer for 1-2 minutes then check consistency. For a thicker salve, add more beeswax. For a softer one, add more oil. Once it is the right consistency, remove from heat and add the essential oil. Pour into small jars.

Lavenders grow best where there is enough calcium in the soil. Some home gardeners like to mulch them with shells

best when there is adequate calcium in the soil – on a commercial production basis the soil pH might be between 6 and 8. Some gardeners like to mulch them with shells to reflect the sunlight and promote healthy growth. Lime may be added to the soil in autumn or before planting.

In clay or wet soils, it might be best to grow them on mounds. Or dig in some sand and grit.

Water well at the time of planting and until plants are established. Mature plants may become drought tolerant, but regular moisture is best to ensure minimal stress during the heat of summer. Strong winds will desiccate plants, so regular watering is necessary in windy spots. Do bear in mind, however, that lavenders hate standing in water.

Lavandula angustifolia and *Lavandula x intermedia* types are more

prone to pests and diseases in areas where humidity is high. There, you will need to space plants sufficiently to ensure good airflow and excellent drainage is especially necessary.

Cut back by about one-third at the end of the season to help your plants look full and lush. If not pruned, they tend to become woody and leggy.

If you want to increase your stock, take soft or semi-hardwood cuttings in spring and autumn respectively.

Lavender can be grown in containers, but after a couple of years the larger varieties are best in the ground, or repotted into much larger containers, as the root structure grows extensively. Just as they are grown in the ground, the soil medium must be free-draining. Make sure there is a controlled-release fertiliser in the potting mix, and water regularly. Repot once a year into a larger pot. ❀



COOK'S COMPANION

Ignore their unyielding exterior – baking turns quinces into a thing of wonder



Quince rootstocks are often used to grow pear trees, providing a dwarfing influence and more rapid fruit production

Once considered old-fashioned, quinces have well and truly made a comeback in our kitchens and backyards. Quince pastes are now a common accompaniment to cheese platters, and the pretty pink blossoms adorning the branches of trees as a welcome sign of spring.

True quinces (*Cydonia oblonga*) originate from Iran and Caucasus, and are a member of the Rosaceae family along with apples and pears. The fruit are similar to the closely related flowering quince (*Chaenomeles japonica*), which produce small, furry fruit borne from very early spring blooms. Chinese quince (*Pseudocydonia sinensis*) are reputedly easy to cook with as the fruit have a smooth skin.

Growing guide

Quince trees are adaptable and hardy, performing well in all areas of New Zealand. Like most fruit trees, quinces will grow and produce best in a location with full sun and free-draining soil – though they will tolerate part-shade and dry spots. The trees prefer a temperate location but still grow well in hot, dry and humid regions. Being deciduous, the trees are frost-hardy down to -20°C. Quinces require less chilling than other deciduous fruits – between 100 and 400 hours – which even the warmest of northern coastal spots would achieve. So north or south, hot or cold, quince trees will produce excellent crops in every Kiwi garden.

Quinces are the laid-back cousin of the fruit tree clan, requiring very little care or attention. The trees are susceptible to few pests or diseases, so spraying is not usually necessary. Quince leaf spot is common, though difficult to prevent, and hardly affects the tree aside from being unattractive – let's call it rustic.



The branches can become quite congested and untidy if left untamed, however a thinning-out prune every second winter is sufficient to maintain the tree's form and avoid a tangled mess. Rootstock growth can sprout from the base of the trunk – simply snip these off while the shoots are young, as close to the trunk as possible.

Quince trees will benefit from a feed with a general fruit tree fertiliser a few times each summer, along with a sprinkling of potash in autumn to boost flower and fruit production.

As the fruit can be very large and heavy, it's a good idea to remove the fruit for the first year or two until the branches are strong enough to sustain a crop.

Landscaping

Quince trees make a stunning garden feature, usually trained with a single trunk to a multi-branched tree. The trees are quite long lived, to around 50 years, and grow to three to five metres tall. The soft-pink cupped blossoms in spring are large but delicate, along the dark stems. The dark, elliptical leaves are slightly fuzzy, give a softened appearance to the tree.

For smaller gardens, quinces can be easily espalier-trained against a wall or fence into a formal tier shape or informal fan.

Recommended companion plants include marigold, borage, chamomile, chives, garlic, comfrey, alyssum, dill and nasturtium.

Propagation

Quince trees are grown in fruit tree nurseries by grafting a piece of a known variety (such as 'Smyrna') to a specially selected quince rootstock.

Interestingly, quince rootstocks are often used to grow pear trees, providing a dwarfing influence and speedier fruit production. Rootstocks named BA29 and Quince C are the most commonly used here. Some pear varieties (such as 'Beurré Bosc', 'Winter Nelis' and 'Williams' Bon Crétien') are not compatible with quince rootstocks, so an interstem or interstock is grafted between the rootstock and the pear variety. This allows the incompatible pear variety to have the dwarfing influence of the quince rootstock, as the alternative pear seedling rootstocks produce a very large tree that take longer to produce a crop.

Harvesting

A mature quince tree will produce up to 20kg of fruit each season, which is usually sufficient for the annual jelly and paste requirements for an extended family! The fruit is harvested in late summer to early autumn, when it turns from green to yellowish and becomes fragrant. The fruit will hang on the tree into the winter, but will be damaged by frosts so anything left can be for the birds to enjoy.

Pick by gently rolling the fruit upwards to detach the short stem from the branch. Try to avoid puncturing the skin or bruising the

flesh. Any blemished or damaged fruit should be used immediately. Store unblemished fruit in single layer trays, making sure the fruit aren't touching each other. Check the fruit regularly, removing and using anything that is starting to blemish. Quinces should store in a cool spot for two or three months.

Cooking

Raw quinces are near inedible, being dry, tough and tannin-tart. Once cooked, however, the fruit transforms into spicy, rich pink flesh. With its high pectin content, the fruit is perfect for preserves like jelly and paste; indeed, the original marmalade recipe used quinces.

Mix slices of quince with stewed apple to add a fragrant spicy flavour to apple pie or crumble. The flavour and texture of quince pairs equally well with savoury dishes, being used in the Persian dish khoresh-e beh (quince stew with lamb), while in

QUINCE PASTE

You could make quince paste on the stove, or use this microwave method. Peel and core quinces, removing any blemishes and the woody, gritty centre. Prepare about 500g of flesh, chopped into cubes. Place in a large glass bowl, with ¼ cup of water and the juice of 1 lemon. Microwave until soft, then mash. Add 250g of sugar then microwave on defrost/low for 20-30 minutes, stirring every five minutes at the beginning, then every minute or so as it thickens. The paste will darken and get thicker.

(Warning: Watch out for hot, sugary lava-like splatters as the fruit boils.)

When the mixture is very thick, pour it into a greased tray such as a shallow roasting dish or large cake tin. When cold, cut into cubes and wrap in baking paper or plastic wrap. Keep in the fridge for a week or so, or longer in the freezer.

With its high pectin content, the fruit is perfect for preserves; marmalade was originally made with quince

Britain a quince sauce is served with partridge and in France slices are often paired with roast quail.

Outside of the kitchen, quinces make a natural room fragrance as "bowl fruit". Romans used the oil for perfume, and the essential oil is used in aromatherapy for its soothing, anti-inflammatory properties.

Varieties

- **'Giant of Gascony'** lives up to its name with very large, golden-skinned fruit, which has a strong fragrance and spicy flavour.
- **'Taihape'** originates from a heritage tree at the Brown Sugar Café in the town of the same name. The fruit is large with smooth, yellow skin.
- **'Pineapple'** is less commonly available in New Zealand, but is widely grown in California and South America. It owes its name to the distinctive flavour, which is similar to that of pineapple.

The fruit is more rounded in shape, has light yellow skin with white flesh that turns pale pink when cooked.

- **'Smyrna'** is a popular variety from Turkey, one of the original homes of the quince. 'Smyrna' fruit are large, furrowed and golden-yellow. The very aromatic, light-yellow flesh is mildly flavoured. When cooked, the fruit retains its fragrance, turns pink and is quite firm, making it the perfect variety for making pastes. It is also an attractive tree with extra-large foliage.

- **'Van Deman'** is an earlier ripening variety with large, bright-yellow/orange fruit that has pale-yellow, spicy-flavoured flesh that turns orange when cooked. It is a heavy bearing and hardy tree that was selected by renowned American fruit variety breeder Luther Burbank in the early 20th century, along with popular plum varieties 'Santa Rosa' and 'Elephant Heart'. ❀

Autumn - it's the perfect time to plant new fruit trees & berry plants.



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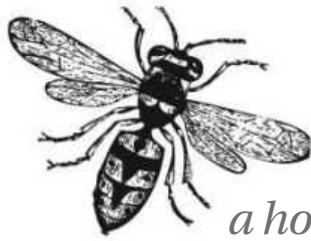
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A German wasp
(*Vespula germanica*)
feeding on honeydew



CAVITY CONUNDRUM

What can you do when a horde of German wasps take up residence in your roof? The answer, says the Bug Man, is simple



One clown decided a good jet from a hose would sort the wasps out; apparently he broke the Olympic hurdling record getting away

Just a few short weeks ago I was reminded of the Kiwi “can-do” approach when a radio talk-back caller asked a question about German wasps. It wasn’t much of a question – more a long litany of DIY activities to prevent the development a perfectly healthy nest in his roof space.

I have no problem with that caller’s desire to destroy a nest of humourless Hymenoptera of questionable origin. After all, these exotic insects seem to have a serious impact here on human health, our economy and just as importantly, the ecological balance in native ecosystems.

These wasps have a tendency to establish themselves in natural and man-made cavities. It starts with a fertile queen creating a small, spherical nest to raise some daughters, who then form the basis of a rapidly expanding nest that can grow to thousands of angry occupants.

And when you see that going on somewhere in the roof cavity of your house, you’d want to kick that in the guts real quick, wouldn’t you?

According to the caller, the wasps were entering through a ventilation strip at the top of the wall, just under the soffit. The strip goes right around the whole house, but the wasps’ entrance was in one small area of that grille.

The solution appeared to be simple: nail a piece of plywood over the entrance and that would be the end of it.

Nah! The wasps simply moved their entrance to just beyond the obstructing board of timber and carried on flying in more nest-building material: chewed wood mixed with saliva makes the best papier-mâché for wasp nests.

So my caller decided to smear copious amounts of grease over the new entrance point on the grille.

The wasps were heard to laugh at him. Being obsessively clean animals, they have no trouble with getting rid of greasy footprints before entering the nest.

So the talkback question was concerned with the next stage of the rapidly escalating battle with the German wasps: “How about drilling a hole in the soffit and blasting the beasts with a borer-bomb?”

I used to get even weirder stories of wasp control in the old days at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Imagine a nest in a hollow tree with a steady stream of wasps on final approach, in a predetermined flight path that separated the “comers” from the “goers”.

One clown decided that a good jet from the garden hose would sort these insects out; just flood the nest and they’ll all drown!

Apparently this chap broke the Olympic record for hurdling over a great distance, as the whole colony chased him over the fence, down a gully and up the other side.

Once you receive one sting, you are a marked man. The pheromone contained within that sting acts like a beacon that the whole chasing bunch can smell!

Then there was the story of a nest in the ground, at the foot of a large tree. The

solution for this was apparently to douse it with a jerrycan of diesel.

“Glug, glug, glug” was the sound it made, followed by an angry buzzing chorus.

If only the diesel had been left inside the jerrycan; the fumes alone would have done the job as wasps find the gases very hard to withstand. But no. What is it about New Zealanders, wasps and diesel? Why strike a match?

Insurance companies are really not impressed with such behaviour!

So what is the answer to all these wasp nests in cavities, holes, roofs and walls?

Believe it or not: some wasp powder. It used to be made from carbaryl, though these days permethrin appears to be the active ingredient of choice.

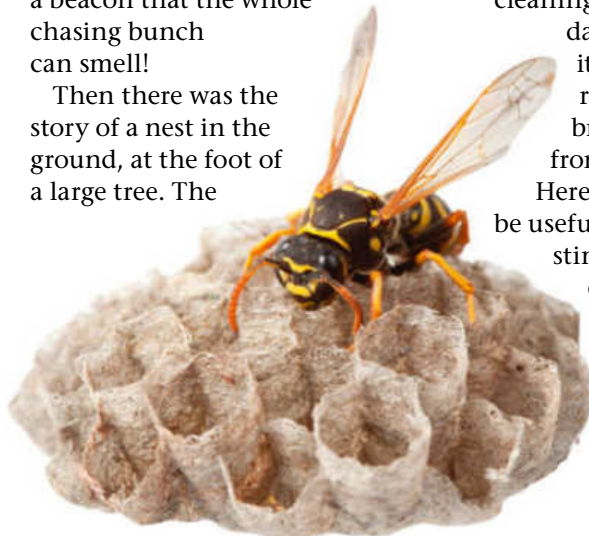
The idea is simple: chuck some of that powder into the nest entrance, take quite a few steps back – then watch what happens.

Wasps may be as obsessively clean as they like, but when they fly in, their wing-beats stir the powder into an uncontrollable dust that will cover them and the interior of the nest. And it only gets worse, the more insects move around.

The insecticide simply spreads and kills the wasps on contact, so cleaning is futile. It will take a few days or even a week or so, but it is pretty effective as the residual deposit even gets the brand-new adults that hatch from their pupae.

Here’s one major tip that could be useful to save yourself from a few stings: approach the nest entrance with your powder at night, when it is cool and most wasps are asleep; act swiftly and decisively.

And don’t wear togs! ❀



DIY PROJECT

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*Rose Hughes constructs a compact,
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MATERIALS

You will need: **Pond** 3m of 240mm x 25mm dressed pine • **Base** 1 sheet of 17mm ply • **Feet** 700mm of 50mm x 50mm H3 treated pine • Selleys 3 in 1 Clear • ADOS adhesive • 6g x 32mm screws • Straight edge • Drop saw • Skilsaw • Sandpaper • Drill, bit and countersink bit • Tape measure and pencil • Cemix Pond & Trough Waterproofers • Undercoat, paint and brushes • Solar water feature (optional)

Cutting list Pond 2 x 900mm x 240mm – sides • 2 x 380mm x 240mm – ends • 1 x 380mm x 210mm – divider

• **Base** 862mm x 380mm

• **Feet** 2 x 350mm

Cost \$200 excluding plants and the solar fountain (about \$20 online).

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1 Cut the timber to size. Mark, drill and countersink the drill screw holes to the bottom and sides of the side panels. Mark, drill and countersink the screw holes to the bottom of the end panels.

2 Apply the ADOS contact adhesive to the long edge of the base and one side panel. Position so that the side is centred on the base and attach with screws. Repeat for the other side panel. Glue and attach the end panels. Clamp or apply pressure to get a good bond.

3 Mark the position for the garden area approximately 300mm from one end. Drill and countersink screw holes to sides and base. Glue and screw into position. Attach the feet from the inside.

4 Silicon seal all of the joins. Allow to dry. Mask the top edge of the box. Then, following the instructions, apply two coats of the Cemix Pond & Trough Waterproofer. Allow to dry between coats and cure for seven days.

5 Fill the screw holes, allow to dry, then sand. Undercoat the exterior of the pond with Quick Dry Primer. I used a metallic paint for this project. Apply a coat of Resene Lumbersider then the top coat. I used Lumbersider 'Optimist' and an Enamacryl Metallic top coat in 'Yeehaa'.

6 Drill a few holes in the base of the garden area. Fill with potting mix and plant up. Add water plants and a solar powered fountain. ❀



OUR PANEL THIS MONTH:
Martyn Callaghan, Russell Fransham, Richard Cato

Ask an expert

FRUIT & VEGE GROWING ADVICE | THIS MONTH

Q **ONION SETS**
When I gardened in the United Kingdom we planted onion sets. I haven't seen these for sale in New Zealand. I'd like to grow sets from seed one year and plant them the next for full sized onions. What timing would you advise?

BARB BEE, CHRISTCHURCH

A Onions grow well from sets in New Zealand. In northern Europe and United Kingdom, where the growing season is shorter than in New Zealand, it is common

to grow onions from sets both in commercial and in home gardens.

A set is a half-grown, torpedo-shaped onion the size of a top of your finger. They are grown from seed sown late in the season, and at high density.

For example a long-storing, main crop onion variety such as 'Pukekohe Longkeeper' can be sowed in September into soil at high density – as close as 1cm between seeds and 10cm between rows.

Main crop onions grown to mature in one season would usually be grown at 10cm intervals in rows 20cm apart.

In February, when the tops fall over indicating bulb maturity, the small onions should be lifted, and size graded. Small bulbs of less than 20mm

are the ones to

keep as sets.
Let them dry

thoroughly then place in the fridge in a non-sealed plastic bag and store them until September. No need to waste the bigger ones – they can be used in place of shallots or as pickling onions.

In September the sets are replanted by pushing them into the soil until they are just covered. Make sure they are the right way up – with the root base facing downwards. The spacing between sets should be 5cm in the row and 25cm between each row.

These will soon sprout, and grow strongly, finally producing an onion bulb of 50-80mm size in early January in the North Island and Nelson, or late January in Canterbury or southern South Island areas.

Onion maturity is indicated by the plant's top falling over. When this occurs lift the onions, bunch them a dozen at a time, tie with string, and hang the onion bunches up until they are required.

'Pukekohe Longkeeper' will store until around August.

Growing onions from sets has the advantage of producing a larger onion bulb than direct sowing, plus the weed control during the second season of planting is easier due to rapid vegetative growth.

Blood and bone fertiliser applied at planting, at the rate of a good handful per square metre, and a good handful of garden lime at the same rate is ideal for growing on the sets to become large onions with good storage qualities.

Martyn Callaghan, Enza Zaden



AUTUMN BULBS



Q EXOTIC LYCHEES

Earlier this year I bought some fresh lychees from the vege market. I managed to get some lychee seeds sprouting on the kitchen bench. I want to know if it is worth the hassle of growing them from seed and if they'll fruit in Wellington?

VIDUSHI MANN, WELLINGTON

A

I have grown lychees here at Matapouri Bay, in Northland. They were vigorous and seemed happy in our climate, thriving on rich black soil with constant moisture (peat loam). They were not fazed by light frosts on properties nearby.

Every summer they flowered with big terminal panicles of tiny blooms rather like mangoes do. But every December it rained every week or so and like our mango trees this made the flowers and tiny, newly set fruit fall off. So after 10 years of this we reluctantly pulled the trees out.

I think a sheltered, warm spot around Wellington would suit the trees but you would need to provide a clear plastic umbrella-like roof to keep the rain off during the crucial flowering period.

Detachable clear, curtain walls would keep them warm and sheltered in winter and dry in spring and summer. Pollination is usually by flies and other small insects.

I've seen this system work in New Zealand with astonishing crops of lychees in the Pukekohe area, south of Auckland, back in the 1980s.

Good luck!

Russell Fransham, subtropical.co.nz

Q GARLIC SPROUTS

What happened to my garlic? I planted in early June and had a good crop but it appears that many of the bulbs had started to grow before I harvested them in mid-December. This hasn't happened before. Did I leave them in the ground too long?

GARRY BRAITHWAITE, WHANGAREI

A

We consulted Richard Cato, who grows flavourful 'Ajo Rojo', 'Printanor' and the heirloom 'Kakanui' garlic near Ohaupo in Waikato. He says that they have had the same thing happen to their crops.

"It has usually been associated with late spring rains. The bulb should be thinking about fattening and drying off but instead gets a flush of rain and nitrogen, and the corms start to regrow. I don't know your feeding programme but suspect this is what may have happened.

"Keep a careful eye on them next year and pull your garlic earlier rather than later. Be careful too about using any fresh manures in your soil preparation. We have no scientific data to back up our answer, this is only our observation. Some soft neck varieties are worse than others. It is probably not an issue in the drier parts of the country."

Stop by the Catos stall at the Hamilton or Cambridge Farmer's Markets for a copy of Richard's tip sheet, *Growing Great Garlic* or have a look at the pictures on the Catos-Garlic-NZ Facebook page.

Barbara Smith

MITRE 10 EASY AS
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Autumn is the time to start thinking about planting your spring flowering bulbs. Bulbs are not just popular for the masses of flowers they produce, but there is the added bonus of fragrance, the flowers are great for picking, and they can be grown in pots. Check out our Easy As guide to help you get started.



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YOUR GARDEN NOTEBOOK



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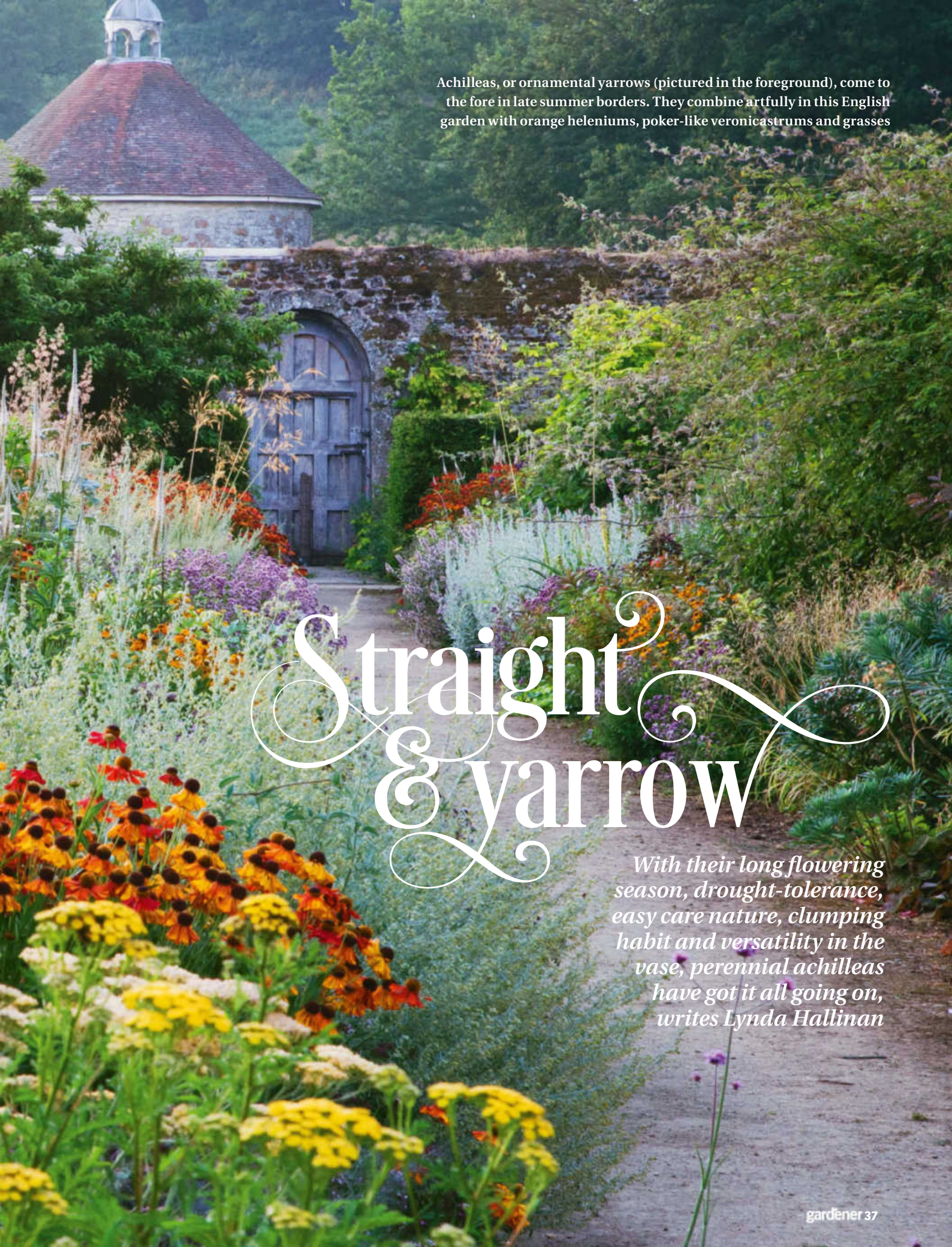


PEOPLE & PLANTS

Striking sculptures draw visitors to a sanctuary garden







Achilleas, or ornamental yarrows (pictured in the foreground), come to the fore in late summer borders. They combine artfully in this English garden with orange heleniums, poker-like veronicastrums and grasses

Straight & yarrow

With their long flowering season, drought-tolerance, easy care nature, clumping habit and versatility in the vase, perennial achilleas have got it all going on, writes Lynda Hallinan



The first achillea I ever saw (not counting the riotous wild yarrow alongside rural roads) wasn't in a garden, but on the cover of the Peak Perennials catalogue in the mid-1990s. Though beloved even then by European and American designers of so-called prairie-style landscapes, these devil-may-care perennials never truly took off here and still remain surprisingly underrated.

Achilleas are unlikely cover girls, boasting flat-chested clusters of tiny flowers on sturdy but slender stems – imagine unshaven legs clothed in fern-like wispy foliage. But if my memory serves me correctly, that old Peak Perennials' catalogue featured a combination of clay pot-coloured *Achillea* 'Terracotta' – a montage of earthy shades of peach, apricot, honey and hay – with the jester-like blooms of raspberry-red *Monarda* 'Gardenvue Scarlet'.

Two decades on, I appreciate those easygoing achilleas as much now as I did then, though my relationship with monardas, aka bee balm or bergamot, remains complicated as they don't like heavy soils and have a habit of rotting out here in winter.

Achilleas don't like wet feet either but, honestly, that's their only foible. In every other way they are the perfect summer perennial, being drought-tolerant, long-flowering, butterfly-attracting, disease-resistant, impervious to all pests (including rabbits, snails and small children, as the flowers aren't easily beheaded without secateurs) and superb for picking, as their stems are quickly prepped for the vase simply by running your thumb and forefinger along the length of the stem to strip off the foliage. Plus the more you cut



According to Greek legend, Achilles' soldiers used yarrow to treat their wounds during the Trojan War, earning this plant its name

them, the more flowers they send up. I pick achilleas by the bucketload from early summer until autumn.

Back in the horticultural heyday of the 1990s, Peak Perennials introduced several stunning achillea cultivars to Kiwi gardens and owners Gillian Thrum and Phil Carson say they were snapped up by keen mail-order customers. Do they still sell well now at their garden centre, The Green Door in Havelock North, I asked? "We hardly sell any," Phil admits.

So why aren't they more popular? Beats me. Is it because they remind some gardeners of pasture weeds, sharing both the colonising habit and umbelliferous silhouette of feral fennel, cow parsley and wild carrot?

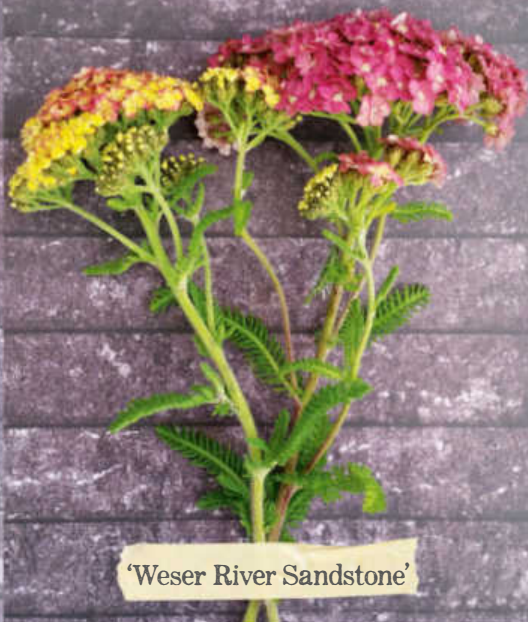
Or is it because achilleas simply don't conform to the demands of modern plant retailing: quite frankly, they look completely rubbish in a pot on a garden centre shelf, and once in bloom they're too gawky to transport.

Achilleas need to be properly bedded in to reveal their true beauty. After transplanting, water the plants in well for a few days then just let them go to it. They look lovely in their first summer but even better in their second. Take a spade to them every fourth or fifth year to maintain their vigour and produce a handy supply of spare plants.

Recently, Phil and Gillian have started hunting down those old achilleas to replant at home, having



'Red Velvet'



'Weser River Sandstone'



'Summerwine'



'Hella Glashoff'



'Anthea'



'Fanal'




'Gloria Jean'



'Terracotta'



'Lavender & Lace'

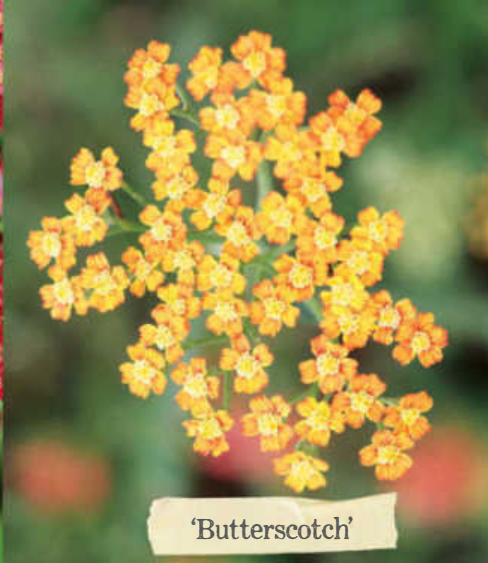
A woman with blonde hair and bangs, wearing a red and white plaid shirt and blue jeans, stands in a garden. She is holding a large, dense bouquet of achillea flowers in both hands. The bouquet is a mix of colors: bright red, yellow, and light pink. The background is filled with lush green foliage, including large oak leaves and some white flowers on the right. The lighting is bright and natural, suggesting a sunny day.

Many achilleas are
chameleon-like, changing
colour as the blooms
age from tomato-red
to mustard-yellow;
lemon to lavender,
or peach to puce-pink

I pick armloads of achilleas from
late December until March. Cut
the stems off as low to the ground
as possible and deadhead faded
blooms regularly to keep the
flowers coming



'Red Velvet'



'Butterscotch'



'The Pearl'



'Pink Beauty'

first taken a chainsaw to some of the trees they'd previously planted, to let sun back into their original borders.

Achilleas are shy to flower in even light shade and Phil says that without "full on sun", the plants grow weak and lose their balance, flopping out of borders instead of padding gaps.

At Marshwood Gardens in Invercargill, Geoff Genge stocks a dozen achilleas in his mail-order nursery, ranging from burgundy *Achillea millefolium* 'Summerwine' to the white daisy-flowered *Achillea decolorans* 'W.B. Child' and *Achillea filipendulina* 'Cloth of Gold', which stands out from the crowd with its shoulder-high, bright yellow blooms.

If you're a tidy gardener who likes everything in its place (and expects it to stay there), achilleas might not appeal. They like to wander a little, poking their heads up through neighbouring plants ('Anthea' is an exception; she stays put), but I reckon

that's part of their charm. As Gillian says, "They're great blendy fillers."

And tough. Let's not forget tough. Summer is no time to be pampering wimpy plants and a bit of mongrel makes a world of difference when you're on tank water or have water restrictions imposed by your council.

One final tip if you're lugging big bunches of achillea stems indoors: open the windows. "Some people think they smell like cat pee," says Geoff. Indeed, I once falsely accused my cats of just such an indiscretion, only to sniff my way to the source of the bad smell emanating from our bathroom: a whiffy, wilted bunch of achilleas on the vanity.

Availability

Seek out achilleas from specialist mail-order nurseries including Maple Glen, Marshwood Gardens, Nikau Hill, Puriri Lane (at the Clevedon Farmers' Market) and Wairere Nursery ❀



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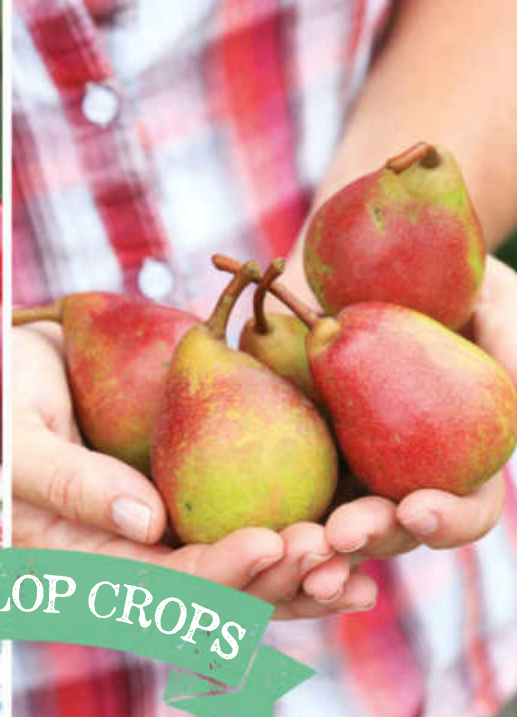
March top & flop CROPS

*Lynda's regular round-up of
the best & worst performers
in her Hunua garden*



EASY BOTTLED FRUIT:

I'll admit to a sigh of relief when the last of the plums are picked. They come on so thick and fast and don't last on the tree, so I bottle as many as I can in my grandmother's old Agee jars. This month, my preserving attention turns to apple sauce – 'Granny Smith', 'Bramley's Seedling' and 'Peasgood Nonsuch' can all be stewed in a little water and bottled without sugar (use the water bath method). Sliced pears, which are firm enough to hold their shape once cooked, are easy to preserve too using the overflow method.



TOP & FLOP CROPS



'FORTUNE' PLUMS:

There are many ways to judge the merits of a particular fruit tree variety, from flavour to vigour and yield. But when you're a keen preserver, there's another factor to consider: how easy is it to extract the pips or stones? Freestone apricots are a doddle to deal with but pitting cherries is a pain in the backside. And when I'm making plum jam from 1kg of large, ruby red 'Fortune' plums, I only have to pick a dozen or so pips out of the pot, compared to 80 or more for the same quantity of tiny purple 'Damson' plums. This makes me love my 'Fortune' trees more and more with every passing preserving season!



'BEURRÉ BOSCH' PEARS:

My five-year-old trees hit their stride this season, producing hundreds of russeted pears per tree. I suspect I should have thinned them, as pears have a habit of biennial bearing. I may be in for a miserable crop next year.



'JALAPEÑO' PEPPERS:

Self-sown! And fully laden with fat green chillies! I'm so chuffed, especially as I didn't get around to planting any chillies earlier in the season.



CROWN PUMPKINS:

As much as I love the look of heirloom pumpkins, with their warty skins, gargantuan girths and fancy French names, nothing beats the humble grey-skinned 'Whangaparaoa Crown' for reliability and long-keeping. My plants, as usual, had a cracker crop.



'SECKEL' PEARS: This sweet wee sugar pear is traditionally on the small side (it's the smallest of the commercially grown varieties) but this year the fruit on my trees was ridiculously little, despite more summer rain than usual. On the plus side, the pears were small enough to bottle whole!



'FREEZER SLIM' BEANS:

My dwarf beans took a beating from green vegetable bugs, who sucked all the pods dry well before they were ready. In a spray-free garden, green shield beetles are a perennial summer nuisance and keeping the plants well irrigated seems to be the only defence, and even then its success is limited.



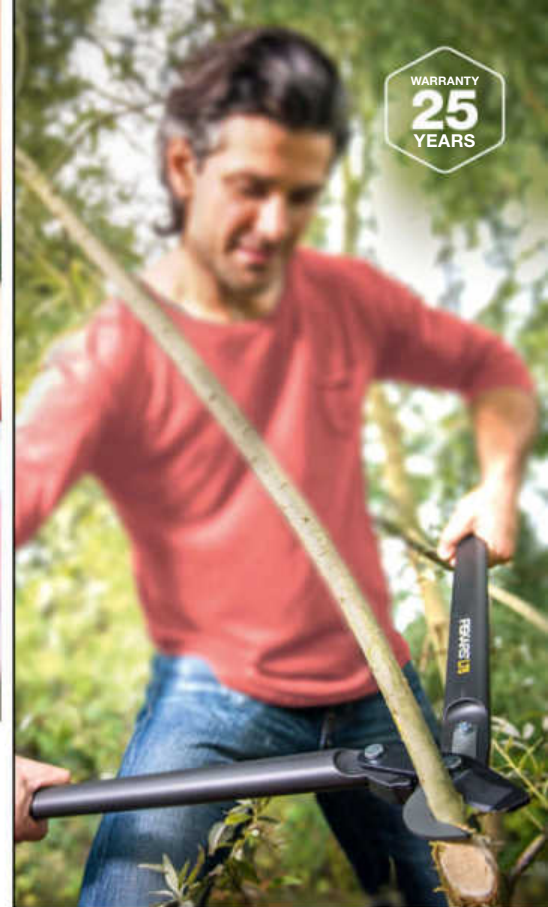
NASHI PEARS:

Our kunekune pigs, who usually do a sterling job of cleaning up the windfall fruit in our orchard, got a bit ahead of themselves this summer. They pushed over my young nashi pear trees, eating first the fruit, then the whole tree.



PEACHERINES:

These big, bald, firm-fleshed (but clingstone) peach/nectarine hybrids usually ripen in the first week of March, but after a fortnight of muggy weather in early February, one by one the fruit on my trees fell prey to the telltale fuzz of brown rot. Heartbreaking. Until now I've resisted spraying my fruit trees with copper but if I'm to avoid a repeat performance next summer, a clean-up spray in autumn now looks unavoidable. I'll get out the loppers and prune them to improve air flow too. 🌿



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NORTH ISLAND

Sculptures by Paul Dibble complement the garden's organic feel. Main image: *Nectar Eater* in the woodland garden; below, left to right: *Fantail on Ring*; the tropical garden; *I am a Tui*, foreground, and *I am a Heron*; *The Gold of the Kowhai*





The herb wheel garden with its central gazebo is planted with generous sweeps of bee attractants such as borage, orange and yellow calendulas and *Echium webbia*

perfect peace

The Sacred Blessing Sanctuary has been a crowd-pleaser on the annual Waiheke Island Garden Safari – now it's open year-round

STORY: CAROL BUCKNELL PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG

Joy Deerness holding
Bob, and Arthur Smith
holding Jina in the
Japanese-inspired
'room'; to their left is
Acer palmatum
dissectum 'Viridis'



Alstroemeria 'Pink Star'



Ornamental kale



Papaver paeoniflorum



Rosa 'Dioressence'



Magnolia 'Serene'



Looming over and around the lily pond are pygmy date and sago palms, *Alcantaria imperialis* 'Rubra', *Philodendron xanadu* and mondo grass

Regenerating native bush in a reserve along two of the boundaries makes the Sanctuary feel even larger, and enhances the atmosphere of peaceful seclusion

After a knee replacement at age 60, Joy Deerness climbed her first mountain. Five years on, she heads for the mountains whenever she has a spare moment, tackling peaks that only experienced mountaineers would climb. Joy is a woman of indomitable spirit and nowhere is this more apparent than in the beautiful garden she has developed on Waiheke Island in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf.

Called the Sacred Blessing Sanctuary, the half-hectare garden is divided into a series of rooms located on a steep hillside overlooking Enclosure Bay on the island's northern coast. Regenerating native bush in a reserve along two of the boundaries makes the garden feel even larger, and enhances the atmosphere of peaceful seclusion. It's an ideal environment for the retreats and motivational workshops run here by Joy and her business partner, Arthur Smith.

The idea of creating a garden sanctuary came to Joy 15 years ago, when she saw a property at the base of the hillside for sale. "I knew it was too much land to look after but it just spoke to me. Everyone thought I was ridiculous to be taking on such a big project at the age of 50. I had to go against the advice of friends and family who thought I was mad."

Joy was undeterred, convincing her bank manager to lend her the money to buy the land. As demand for her workshops grew she acquired two more adjoining properties. "I started at the bottom and worked my way up the hill."

Now the sanctuary comprises three townhouses, ponds, a woodland area, tropical and rose gardens, a fernery, an enormous herb parterre, vegetable potager

and orchard. Joy refuses to take all the credit for this mammoth achievement, constantly acknowledging the hard work of her dedicated group of helpers. Alongside Arthur, the team includes his brother Alan, who built most of the stone paths and walls that meander around the property, and Jenni Kent, the garden manager who has been commuting to Waiheke from Auckland four days a week for 11 years. "It's the best job in the world," Jenni says.

Even the over-arching layout of the garden was a collaborative process, Arthur explains. "It just evolved naturally. We would discuss what we were doing but we had no fixed plan, it was a natural progression. Neither Joy, myself, nor Alan had any experience with horticulture or design. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't."

The entrance to the sanctuary garden is through a shady courtyard, where a softly trickling water feature is surrounded by lush ferns. From the cool shadows you emerge onto a bright, sunlit terrace overlooking the first room in the garden – this one with a subtropical theme. The water follows you out via a rocky channel where Joy and Arthur's dogs love to splash about on a hot day, then cascades down the slope to a large, circular waterlily pond. Surrounding the pond is a lawn of mondo grass, behind which is a circlet of dwarf palms (*Phoenix roebelenii*) that screens it from the rest of the site. Red-leaved bromeliads and crucifix orchids (epidendrum) provide vibrant colour, while tall clumps of the Lord Howe wedding lily (*Diets robinsoniana*) add drama with their spikes of white flowers splashed with yellow.

"We bought the epidendrum to see how they would



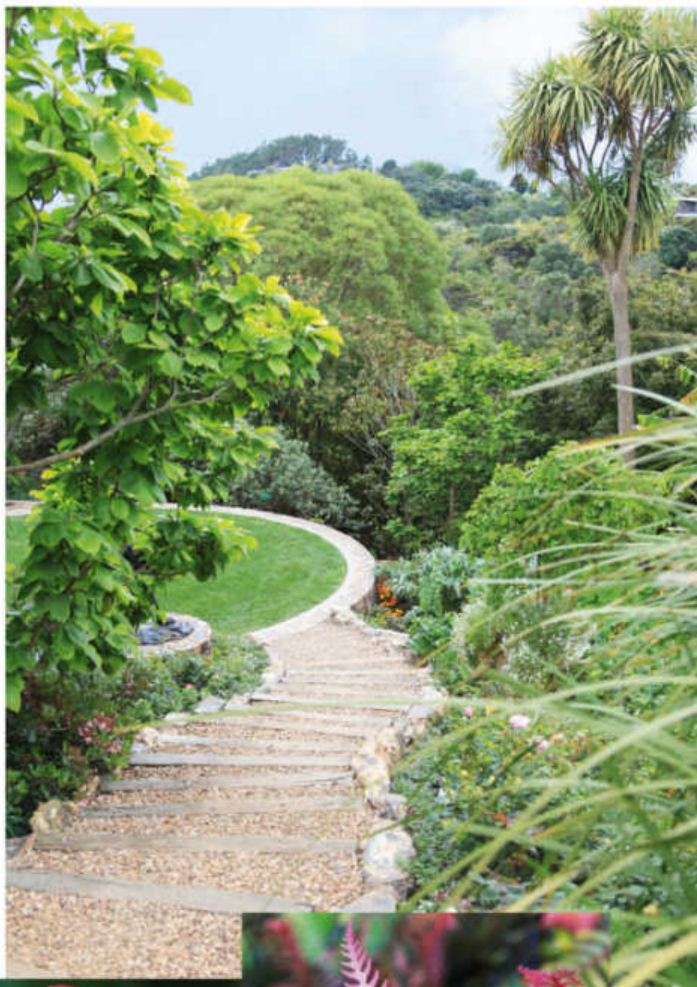
This image: Paul Dibble's *Rabbit Fights Back* overlooks the vege garden; below: the same stairs viewed from above, looking over the McKenzie Reserve

grow in this area and they love it," says Joy. "We leave the oxygen weed on the surface of the pond to provide protection for the goldfish from kingfishers. We probably have over 50 in there. When the weed gets too thick we just sieve it out and throw it on the compost."

Keeping the lawn of dwarf mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Nana') looking green and lush is no problem, explains Arthur. "We mow it once a year, usually in September. The leaves get sunburnt and the mowing takes off the yellowing foliage."

From the intimate subtropical garden the site opens out down the slope into a magnificent parterre herb

The herb parterre is Jenni's domain and she has filled it with so many types, she's lost count. All the herbs are used on the Sanctuary's retreats



garden laid out in a circular design, with a handsome black gazebo at its centre. "We had the top made in Auckland and Alan built the base," says Arthur. "It's a collaboration, like most things around here."

A beautiful Paul Dibble bronze kowhai sculpture is positioned at the far end of the parterre, one of several works by the artist in the sanctuary. "We chose Paul Dibble's work because it suits the natural, organic feel of the garden," Joy explains.

The herb parterre is Jenni's domain and she has filled it with so many different types she's lost count. "Hundreds, definitely," she says. "All the herbs and vegetables we grow here are used for our retreats. We are vegetarian so we use a lot."

"We do all our own composting, have worm farms and make fertilisers from comfrey and seaweed. We also do lots of feeding with horse and alpaca manure from some of the neighbouring properties. We started the garden using only permaculture principles but it doesn't always work around here because we are forever fighting off rabbits. As the garden is bordered by reserves they can come in easily."

Jenni's idea for the parterre was to create a wheel of herbs radiating outwards, within another larger circle of herbaceous perennials and annuals. This plan intensifies the scents of all the herbs and flowers, as well as the loud hum of bees and other insects that are attracted to the garden. You could spend all day in this area alone, but Arthur leads us onward into the cool woodland area.



Rosa 'Fragrant Cloud'



Doodia australis



Epidendrum denticulatum



Scleranthus biflorus



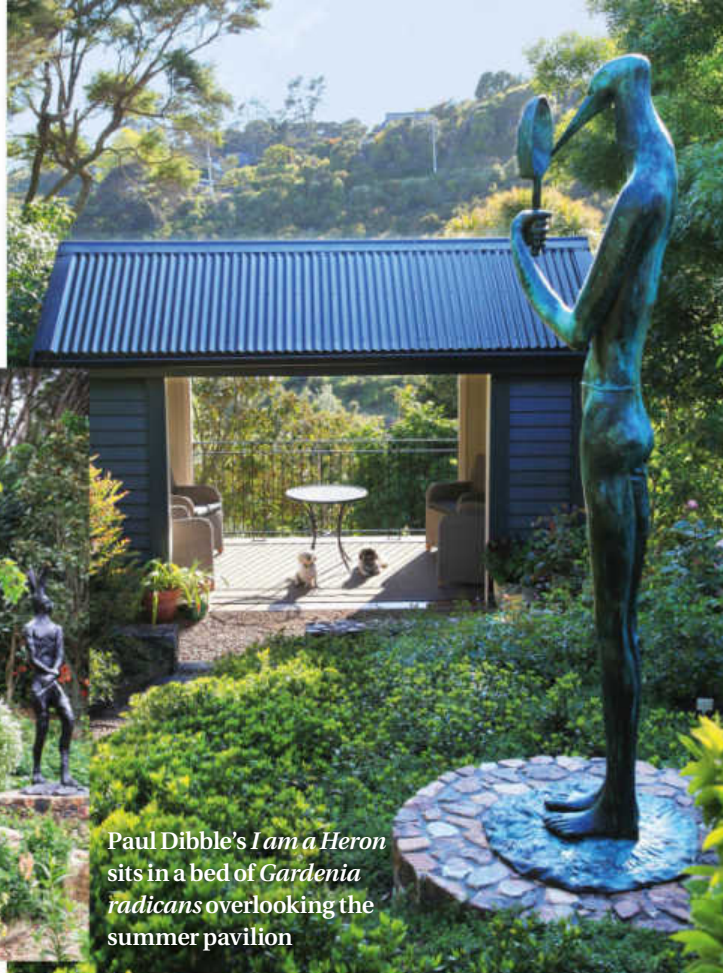
Hybrid cymbidium



Obelisk amid *Brachyglottis greyi* and *Leonotis leonurus* looking toward Oneroa Beach



Potted weeping mulberry tree in the lower vegetable garden



Paul Dibble's *I am a Heron* sits in a bed of *Gardenia radicans* overlooking the summer pavilion

Here a mix of exotic and native trees are underplanted with rengarenga lily and clivia. "We created this area to showcase the sculptural trunks of the manuka and nikau. Many of the plants we have in the garden are grown from seed including the clivia."

The path continues on down the slope, past mass plantings of orchids and ferns to a lawn overlooked by another magnificent Paul Dibble sculpture, *Rabbit Fights Back II*. "It's Paul's take on mankind's comedic relationship with rabbits," Arthur explains.

As we wind through the different rooms, each with its own piece of sculpture, some with lawns, an elegant pavilion or a pond, the sense of tranquillity becomes more and more pervasive. It's not hard to understand why people come here to retreat and meditate.

The final room is a sheltered area, Japanese in its feel with maples (*Acer palmatum*), viburnum and grevillea, the latter providing nectar for a tui, unperturbed by our presence. "All the areas of the garden are deliberately quite different," Joy says. "With its wind, clay soil and minimal water, Waiheke is a very difficult place to grow many plants. And because our site is so steep all the plants and materials had to be carried in by wheelbarrow; every rock, every plant, every load of mulch. We really wanted to challenge ourselves and create a diversity of plants. And we did." ❀

How to visit: Sacred Blessing Sanctuary is now open to the public for small group tours of the garden and sculptures, by appointment only. Sacredblessingsanctuary.co.nz



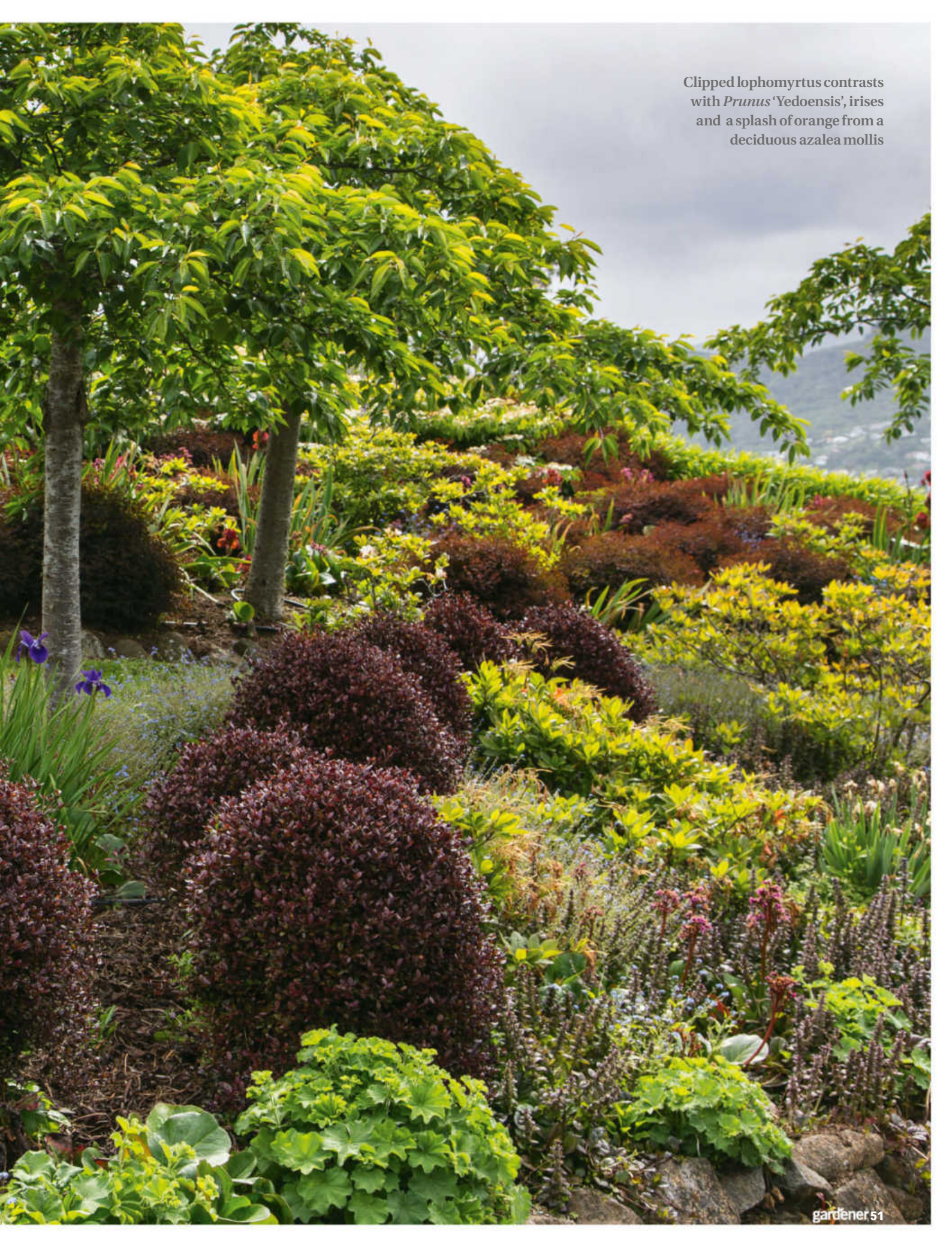


SOUTH ISLAND

Safe harbour

A private garden on the Otago Peninsula offers a masterclass
in colour combinations and planting to the conditions

STORY: CHRISTINE RUSH PHOTOS: PAUL MCCREDIE



Clipped lophomyrtus contrasts
with *Prunus* 'Yedoensis', irises
and a splash of orange from a
deciduous azalea mollis

Magnolia 'Star Wars' dominates the woodland area behind the house. The stream, formerly full of rubble, is now lined with maples and rhododendrons





Rusty-hued flowers and shrubs mingle with irises in deep borders in front of the house

Barbara considers the woodland area her greatest success. Here magnolias, witch hazel, hellebores, ferns and weeping birch thrive in the stream-side shade

Rich in wildlife, history, beauty and soul, the Otago Peninsula is also a fantastic destination for horticulturally minded visitors. There's Lanarch Castle Gardens, of course, the peerless creation of our own Dunedin correspondent Margaret Barker. Just down the hill Glenfalloch Gardens, managed by the Otago Peninsula Trust, is a delightful place to ramble for an afternoon. And remote Hereweka is well worth the twisting drive on metal roads for its wonderful collections of trees and perennials.

Now you can add another garden to the list of the peninsula's horticultural treasures: Barbara and Gerry Wilkins' harbour-side property stretches over woodland, stream and hills covered with clever plant and colour combinations.

When they bought the Portobello Road property in 1989 there was just a couple of hillside paddocks with stupendous views over the harbour. As construction began on the house, designed by architect Ken Davis, Barbara furnished the surrounding land with rhododendrons, maples, perennials and roses while raising four children with her husband, Gerry.

Landscape architect Susan Mort was brought on board. "She was amazing," says Barbara. "She helped a lot with suggestions for plants, often quite unusual varieties or species, such as a particular sort of catmint that kept a nice form and lovely colour. We tried to source her suggestions, but it was a very flexible plan that she helped to formulate."

"It's very much directed by the landscape," she says of the planting. "We have these lovely uninterrupted views of harbour, but the front is like a wind tunnel, so

natives and tough rugosa roses go up there. The house too was designed with views of the garden in mind: the long, straight driveway, and the view to the woodland area at the back, we were always thinking about aspect."

At the time of purchase, a stream meandering behind the house had three truck loads worth of rubbish, and elderberry and blackberry had to be cleared out with chainsaw. Somewhat controversially, given their weedy nature, gunnera were planted instead alongside little treasures like fritillarias and trilliums. "Gunneras work there because it's a big space, and it needs big, bold planting for dramatic effect. The gunnera die right down in winter then come away again in spring, but I find all the different phases so lovely, from the first lattice-work shoots, to their orange seeds later on."

Barbara considers the woodland area behind the house her greatest success. Here camellia, witch hazel, hellebores, bluebells, weeping birch and ferns thrive in streamside shade, overseen by 'Black Tulip', 'Vulcan' and 'Star Wars' magnolias. "It's all so cool and lush there," says Barbara, "and the overall effect is so restful."

Winding up towards a blue bench is a path lined with hostas, geraniums, rhodos, renga renga lilies ("I love them for their wide-leaved, architectural form. Even when they get hit hard by frost they come back"), snowdrops, irises, *Ajuga reptans*, astilbes, weeping Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum* 'Senkaki') and *Rhododendron maddenii*, while swathes of *Chionochloa flavicans* (miniature toe toe) provide airy movement along the back fence. On the opposite bank mass plantings of lime-green-stemmed cornus, hydrangeas and viburnums add to the tranquil, leafy character.

Rock walls are very much a feature of the Otago



Astrantia major



Iris 'Silver Edge'
and bergenia



Geum montanum



Delphinium hybrid



Ajuga reptans
'Purpurea'

Stone walls are a feature of the peninsula, being used for stock control since the early farming days. Here, they add character and structure



Himalayan silver birches
underplanted with *Dianella*
tasmanica 'Crompton'



The brick garage
provides an
attractive focal
point alongside
the driveway



Gerry in the
vegetable
garden

Peninsula vernacular, being used for stock control since the early farming days. Barbara and Gerry loved them, so enlisted a local landscaper to help install them – some of which were rescued from old, ruined walls. Now swathed in grey-green lichens, they add character and structure to the front garden and combine strikingly with *Astelia chathamica* 'Silver Spear'.

Dunedin gardens can take a while to wake from winter dormancy but when they do, the result is spectacular. Flowering cherries (*Prunus* 'Yedoensis'), Siberian irises and white-stemmed Himalayan birches (*Betula jacquemontii*) bring the borders along the driveway to life in spring. Flax can look ratty this far south so Barbara has instead lined the front rock walls with *Dianella tasmanica* 'Crompton', a hardy, pest-resistant, low-maintenance Australian grass that provides a green foil for the birches' white bark.

In front of the house is a striking *Magnolia* 'Tolanthe' specimen: "We knew it was going to get big, but we just love to sit in the lounge and admire the flowers when it's in bloom." Underneath are flowers and shrubs planted for successive swathes of rust and sunshine; day lilies, *Alchemilla mollis* and azaleas as well as dogstooth violets and Chatham Island forget-me-nots.

Above this, next to the lawn, is a perennial and native border that again plays with different textures, shades and highlight planting to great effect: sedums and hebes, russet euphorbias and irises, orange azaleas mollis and clipped burgundy lophomyrtus and more flowering cherries.

The rose border on the exposed harbour-side boundary is tinged a dark raspberry-pink, courtesy of the rugosas 'Roseaie de l'Haÿ', and pure white from David Austin's 'Blanc Double de Coubert' whose semi-double blooms thrive in the tough coastal conditions. There are yet more irises, some white hazels, orange blossom and honeysuckle groundcover.

With cool conditions and its exposed setting, have there been any failures over the years?

"As with any gardening, there was a lot of trial



Barbara tends her irises



Viburnum plicatum
f. *tomentosum* 'Mariesii'
in the perennial border

and error," says Barbara. "We started several plants in different parts of the garden to see where they would be happy and if that didn't work we didn't bother to keep trying. We had some azaleas in the front border, but it was too exposed. It wasn't until we'd replaced them a few times that we realised they weren't going to like it there. Maples too have had to be moved out of the front garden, which is exposed to the prevailing wind coming down the valley. But in other parts of the garden they have established beautifully."


While the Wilkins have sourced most of the plants from local nurseries and garden centres, it's the plants that have been shared by other enthusiasts that Barbara really loves and appreciates. "So many plants have come from other people's gardens. My mum in particular has given me so many – lots of lily of the valley and irises, rhodos and things like that – that have really helped to fill the beds. When you've got a big garden like this, you're always grateful for any plants you can split up and spread around!"

When he has time away from his busy job in medicine, Gerry spends summer evenings pottering in the veg patch, where herbs, brassicas and new potatoes thrive, or tending to the glasshouse full of tomatoes.

Now, after years in the making, the Wilkins can finally stop, sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labour in peace. (They occasionally open the garden to clubs and for fundraising events.) "We don't have any plans for more development. I don't think I'm allowed to push out any more fences because it all used to be paddocks, and the garden's just got bigger and bigger," Barbara laughs. "Though we might create a walk down to the neighbours through hornbeams and daffodils..." ❀



the far



The formal parterre was tricky to landscape: 'We had to keep running upstairs to look down on it from the bathroom window'

country

They fell in love with Kiwi rural gardens while living here – so this couple decided to recreate one in a beautiful corner of England

STORY: NICKY PELLEGRINO PHOTOS: JENNY LILLY

Main image: The view to the house from the lily pond
From left to right below: woodland stream; wedding cake tree; old hand pump; wild flower meadow





Lee and Pam Wheeler moved back to the UK from New Zealand 15 years ago

“Garden rooms would have shut out the surrounding countryside,” says Lee. “We wanted to build a seamless space that was a pleasant place to enjoy the view”

Lee and Pam Wheeler honed most of their skills over the 10 years they spent maintaining an old, established property in Wellington. On a 0.2ha section running down to a gully in Ngaio, it had won a couple of hillside garden awards back in the 1950s. Pam describes it as being “a little like a fairy glen”, with the top half terraced and the bottom left to go wild, with large trees and a stream.

The couple, who worked in telecommunications, moved back to the UK for family reasons 15 years ago and wanted to have a very different sort of experience there. So they decided to design and build their own garden on a 1.2ha property in the Shropshire Hills, inspired by many of the rural gardens they had visited while living in New Zealand.

“We particularly loved the gardens that had been created by farmers’ wives,” says Lee. “Often they had started as quarter-acre sections then spread out, and they were always beautiful to look at and peaceful to enjoy.”

Pam had kept notebooks on those garden tours, jotting down the names of any plants she saw and liked. She didn’t read the notes again until their return to England, when she noticed the same plants kept appearing – mostly trees such as *Acer griseum* (paper-bark maple), *Cornus controversa* ‘Variegata’ (wedding cake tree) and *Betula papyrifera* ‘Commutata’ (paper birch).

The Shropshire Hills is a nationally designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Its ancient hedgerows and small meadows appealed to the Wheelers, reminding them of the English countryside of their childhoods; however it was the mostly untouched land of Jessamine Cottage that really excited them.

“The previous owner had run it as a camping and

caravan site,” explains Lee, “so there were extensive grass meadows that had been mowed. No livestock had been grazed here and the ground didn’t need to be levelled or improved. It was a blank canvas.”

“And we didn’t have to correct other people’s mistakes,” adds Pam. “We could just get on with what we wanted, so it was perfect really.”

The landscape around Jessamine Cottage influenced their vision. It looks out across a valley towards Wenlock Edge, a tree-covered escarpment that is renowned in the UK as an important geological site.

“Garden rooms would have shut out the surrounding countryside,” says Lee. “Instead, we wanted to build a landscape garden that wasn’t in your face, with nothing screaming ‘look at me’ – just a seamless space that was pleasant to be in and to enjoy the view.”

The couple had inherited a pond built by the previous owner, along with one corner planted to attract wildlife and some stunning mature oak trees – one is 250 years old – dotted about the perimeter.

It might have seemed a dauntingly large project for design first-timers to tackle but, says Lee, “It’s like eating an elephant – we didn’t attempt it all at once.”

Essentially the section is shaped like a triangle with the house at the northernmost corner. Beside this they have created a kitchen garden, shaped like an old-fashioned kite and divided into four. One of the beds is for soft fruit; the others are rotated with mostly green vegetables, supplying them with year-round eating. “We’re keen on asparagus so we have that for breakfast, lunch and dinner when in season,” says Pam.

Also beside the house is a formal parterre with boxed hedged areas containing *Origanum laevigatum* to attract



Mature oaks – the oldest of which is 250 years old – frame views to Wenlock Edge

bees and butterflies and white 'Moonlight' roses, which the couple planted after lavender failed to flourish in the damp English weather.

The parterre proved one of the more challenging areas to create. "Having drawn its triangular shape on paper, it was amazing how difficult it was to fit onto the ground and decide what it should line up with," explains Pam. "We had to keep running upstairs and looking down on it from the bathroom window. It took us a whole afternoon."

The heavy, clay soil and the cold, wet winters also presented difficulties and were especially

A kowhai seedling from their Wellington garden was fine for 10 years, then a severe late autumn with heavy frosts froze the tree and it died



A vintage plow rusts in front of the lime avenue



Miniature willow wigwams support perennials

crushing for their dream of maintaining a New Zealand connection in the garden. One short-term success was a kowhai: a seedling from their Wellington garden.

"We nurtured it and put it in a sunny sheltered spot," says Pam. "It was fine for about 10 years and flowered profusely for two. Then we had a severe late autumn, with heavy frosts before the sap had dropped. The poor tree froze and died. Very sad: but we knew it would happen one day."

The hebes didn't do well either and a big frost killed off a cabbage tree the previous owner had planted. "But we chopped it down and it sprang up again," says Pam. "The flax has survived too – it's just the bog-standard one you see all over New Zealand but unfortunately we don't have the tui to take the nectar."

There were more disappointments when they planted trees during the coldest part of winter. "Water drained into the holes that we had dug and froze," recalls Pam. "We lost quite a lot of trees and after that never planted in autumn and winter, only spring."

Beyond the house there is a central hedge, with the pond on one side with mown grass, trees and large shrubs and on the other a more formal rectangle with a lime avenue in the middle and two large ash trees forming an arch.

The couple laugh as they describe themselves carefully measuring every dimension of the lime avenue at the National Trust's Coughton Court to be sure they had got the height and distance right. "People walking past must have wondered what we were doing but that was six years ago and it's worked a treat," says Lee.

Wildlife is encouraged into the garden – although they do have to shoot the rabbits and squirrels. The three-metre deep pond attracts moorhens and dragonflies,

and in the area below it they allow wildflowers to self-seed. "It's not the best soil so what is there is what wants to be there," says Lee. "We've got 300 to 400 pyramid orchids now, lots of cowslips, meadow buttercups, agrimonia and dog daisies. Once a year we cut it down and it springs back up again. The balance between what we've done to the garden and what nature has done is very attractive and pleasing."

The more cultivated areas include two large crescent-shaped island beds filled with mixed shrubs such as hydrangeas, paeonies, roses and viburnums, plus perennials like penstemons, hemerocallis, heleniums, rudbeckias and potentillas.

"In Wellington we got tired of the small terraced beds so we opted to have big beds here," says Pam. "One is supposed to be blue and yellow – which happens at some points of the year – and the other is pinks and greys."

Creating winter interest was important so they have planted *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' for its red stems and candle-like buds, *Prunus serrula* for its mahogany bark, and *Parrotia persica* for its colour and shape.

The Wheelers are proud to have designed and maintained the garden by themselves. Since Pam teaches maths and economics part-time at Wolverhampton University, it is Lee who spends the most time working in it, with the kitchen garden in particular his domain.

"Weather permitting, I'm outside for four to five hours a day. Although it's less in winter and I've developed the British worker's affinity for tea breaks," he says.

With Lee now 70 and Pam 68, they admit they're starting to slow down. "We're getting to the stage where we sit down at the end of the day and wonder why we're so tired," says Pam.

Since they love the area and the property, they have no plans to move on and are focusing instead on making the garden more low maintenance and investing in machinery to help.



The kite-shaped veg plot keeps the Wheelers in greens year-round

"This year I went up a great big ladder to trim the lime avenue and thought, 'I don't want to do this any more'," says Lee. "So I've got myself an extended hedge cutter."

And since neither of them is fond of weeding they do what they can to keep it to a minimum. "We live by the maxim, 'One year seeding, seven years weeding'," explains Lee. "So we're religious about pulling up a weed that looks like it's about to flower and if we haven't got time we'll at least quickly take off the flower heads. A lot of the beds and cultivated areas are completely covered now in the summer with non-weed material. We'll give the main beds a good clear out at the end of the year and again in late spring, then after that they can mostly be left to themselves with just a few things dead-headed."

The couple were certainly not design experts when they started out. Instead they credit their can-do Kiwi attitude with helping them create an extensive country garden where once there was a sea of grass.

"We adopted the view that we could do anything – then just got on with it," says Pam. "You learn things as you go along. Our process has been to go and see what other people have done, try it out and hope for the best. Now we'll look at the place and think, 'We did this!' We're not artists or designers, so to have created a garden that looks so good is rather nice. We feel like we've achieved something." ❀



Acer palmatum
'Dissectum
atropurpureum'

Hosta 'June'

Rodgersia podophylla

Corydalis flexuosa and
Hakonechloa macra

A New Zealand fern



Each year Peter starts around 200 seedlings, which he later whittles down to 12

bright stars

Seeing a champion's table of pale dahlias spurred Peter Burrell to breed colourful cultivars – and now he can't stop

STORY & PHOTOS: SANDRA SIMPSON



Peter Burrell imports breeding stock from England

“I was just driving my wife to the shows,” Peter says, “I wasn’t growing dahlias or particularly interested in them.” But seeing all those pale-coloured champions made the Te Puke resident decide to have a go at breeding some colourful, new varieties.

Kotare Dahlias was born some 27 years ago, the prefix registered as an international identifier of the breeder. “Kotare is the Maori name for the kingfisher,” Peter says. “I liked it because it was a short name and, if you know the bird, full of colour.”

Among his releases have been ‘Kotare Linda’ (orange), ‘Kotare Magic’ (red), ‘Kotare Irene’ (purple), ‘Kotare Jackpot’ (red), ‘Kotare Noah’ (orange), ‘Kotare Sarah’ (pink and white) and ‘Kotare Buttermilk’ (cream). Now the grandchildren’s names have been used up, wife Val is to have a dahlia named for her soon, likely a pink fimbriata that is showing plenty of promise.

Describing himself as “a bit competitive”, Peter loved putting the purple and creamy-yellow ‘Kotare Sparkle’ on show benches for the first time last year. “It’s a new colour combination and a great depth of flower, and it got a good reaction from other growers and the judges.”

When starting his breeding programme Peter, who turns 79 this year, called on his years of experience as a horticulture inspector for MAF. He moved to Te Puke in the early 1980s to work with the kiwifruit industry.

While working at a local timber mill Peter saved a workmate’s legs from being crushed but incurred a back injury that saw him spend the last 10 years of his working life as a taxi driver. Although his back still troubles him, Peter enjoys working with his dahlias.

His son, Mark, each year installs a forest of umbrellas as sun and rain protection, as well as three layers of bamboo grids over the beds. “Dahlias like to grow in their own space and this gives them a bit of room.”

“I started with 47 plants – but all of a sudden there were dahlias everywhere,” Peter recalls of his first year of breeding. “At the end of that year I ended up with 120 stakes – one stake for each tuber.” However, he saved only one seedling. “That was nearly 30 years ago. Boy, I’m starting to get interested now!”

Peter quickly began importing breeding stock from England to improve the gene pool of New Zealand-bred dahlias. “Some of them are quite expensive though. By the time you add local biosecurity inspections and certification, six tubers cost around \$200. Let’s just call it an interesting – and sometimes expensive – hobby.”

Appearing on show benches this year for the first time in New Zealand are ‘Rossendale Heide’ and ‘Westerton Stephanie’, from Halls of Heddon, in north-east England.

At its peak Kotare Dahlias leased the next-door section and Peter had 360 plants staked. When the extra land was no longer available the number dropped to about 120 until Peter developed new beds on his own section – including a crowded area at the back with its own irrigation system. He is now back up to about 160 plants, and is always looking to squeeze in a few more.

Generally, Peter starts about 200 seedlings each year. Initially he saved only three or four for development; more recently, he’s been holding on to 12. Plants that make it through the selection process are grown for three years – partly to ensure they don’t revert to one of their parents – and are constantly reassessed. The best tubers are named and released for sale in year four.

“I’m always on the lookout for something new,” Peter says. “It can be shape and size, but equally important are health and vigour – and a flower’s no good if it’s got a weak stem so getting that right is important. If a plant looks like it’s not healthy it doesn’t last two minutes here. I’m looking for lasting effects.” (He is always surprised, however, how often a plant that is struggling can thrive with a change of position.)

At the end of the season, Mark lifts all the tubers and works a good helping of cow manure into the soil. When the tubers are replanted in October, a mulch of shredded paper or hay is added. “With the way the weather’s going we need to get serious about mulching,” Peter reckons. “It really helps keep moisture in the soil.”

Peter has previously served as Dahlia Society of New Zealand president and vice-president, alongside Val as secretary-treasurer. He was also co-manager of the North Island dahlia trial grounds in Rotorua until they closed a



An unnamed Kotare seedling



Another dahlia under development



'Kotare Noah'



'Kotare Linda'



Vigour is just as important as form



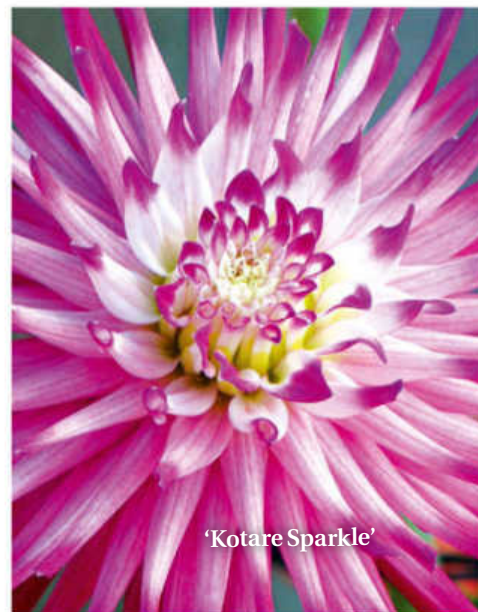
A fimbriated cultivar



Pink ball dahlia seedling



'Kotare Irene'



'Kotare Sparkle'

couple of years ago, and before that had managed their predecessor in Te Awamutu. "It was a lot of work and no one gets expenses. That's just how it is... and we're all getting older."

The national trial grounds are now sited at Paradise Gardens, owned by Jeanette and John Cuthbertson, at Hinds, near Ashburton. Last year Peter won a third prize with 'Kotare Noah', another in his "fair share" of recognition and awards.

He plans the flowering around his nearest shows – Waihi (January), Rotorua (February) and Hamilton (February and March) – and attended the North Island national show in Napier in February, as well as judging all over the country.

"I'm supposed to be slowing down," he laughs. "But I love seeing the blooms in other parts of the country. 'Pam Howden' is interesting – it does well in South Island shows but not in the North Island. It's a much more intense colour down south – almost a different flower – because of the colder winters."

People who show dahlias want plants to put energy into one or two big blooms. To achieve a large flower – some of them are the size of a small plate – means removing extra buds. "But if you don't disbud you get a show of flowers on the plant and that's what most gardeners want."

He occasionally supplies dahlias to florists for weddings and other occasions, but his show blooms always come first. "Florists usually want particular colours so sometimes I'm not much help because I'm growing plants to show, not because the colour's in fashion."

Mildew and earwigs (which eat the petals) are his two biggest enemies. To combat mildew he mixes up a spray of 1 dessertspoon of baking soda with 1 teaspoon of washing-up liquid and 1 litre of water. But be sure to spray only the foliage, Peter warns, as the mix will brown off flowers!

Many growers use pyrethrum-based sprays against earwigs and although he believes them to be effective, Peter prefers a weak solution of Ripcord (3ml to 1 litre of water).

GROWING GUIDE

- **Lift dahlias** at the season's end in the coldest parts of the country, or every two or three years in warmer parts and store tubers in a cool, dry place without too much light. Packing them in dry sand or sawdust is helpful.

- **Several weeks** before planting (about Labour Weekend), work over the area to be planted, adding some compost to the soil. (Don't use raw manure). The spot will need to get at least 3-4 hours of full sun daily and be protected from prevailing winds. Dahlias will grow in almost any soil but prefer well-drained, loamy conditions.

- **Add a dressing** of well-balanced garden fertiliser 10-14 days before planting.

- **Put in a stake**, then plant tubers 10-12cm deep and on an angle to avoid rot.

- **When the plant** is about 20cm high pinch out the centre to promote bushy growth and more flowers.

- **When the plant** is about 30-45cm high apply the first stake tie – you are likely to need two through the season.

Source: *Dahlia Society of NZ*

His solution for whitefly is simple: buy a cheap, plastic bucket, cut it into strips, wipe a quantity of detergent on each strip and hang them in trees around the dahlias. "You'll gradually get the whitefly numbers down and even catch a few other things while you're at it, like thrips and mites. Couldn't be easier."

Peter is right behind fellow dahlia breeder Dr Keith Hammett's campaign to have a worldwide register of dahlias, which will record every named variety, its breeder and year of registration. "I saw a patch of dahlias being shown at Floriade [in the Netherlands] in 2012 and knew I was looking at 'Kotare Jackpot'," Peter says, "but it had been given a Dutch name and there was nothing I could do about it. A worldwide register would give us smaller breeders a leg to stand on." ❀



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IN SEASON

Last hurrah

Neil Ross shows how to keep the drama and colour coming with these striking late summer bulbs



PHOTO: JONATHAN BUCKLEY/GAP PHOTOS

Just as the summer orchestra of plants is settling down to a sleepy waltz, the bulb big guns roar into life, with balls of flaming fireworks careering through the undergrowth

Bulbs at bedtime; that's how it feels as summer sags and you aren't expecting anything spring-like springing from bare-back earth. At this time of year a bulb (or rhizome; they are technically similar storage organs) has to work harder than the September mob to stand proud in the mad jungle. Back in September, borders were relatively nude and anything purple or yellow on a stick was seized upon as a standout, but now you need to find honkers to carry the tune in the mêlée.

Enter the bulb big-gun horn section. Just as the summer orchestra of plants is settling down to a sleepy waltz they roar into life with their trumpets and tubas and balls of flaming fireworks careering through the undergrowth. Many of these exciting plants have slept since Christmas and send up blooms like periscopes scouting ahead before the submarine of new sets of leaves emerges so the effect of the blazing blooms against bare soil takes on a Martian-like drama.

There are a host of nerines honking into autumn mainly in shades of smoky pinks and even purple in the new hybrids – bred from pink parent *Nerine bowdenii* and the more racy red *Nerine 'Fothergillii Major'*. You don't see this latter species so much now – a smart little fiery firework which loves the same conditions of bold rock-garden plants such as aloes and

Eucomis pallidiflora subsp. *pole-evansii*

The biggest pineapple lily of them all, its creamy white spikes are less flower and more condominium. Rising high above architectural leaves and fading from white to green, they last well into autumn before frost melts them to slush. Plant the bulbs with their necks out of the soil and water well through summer. Pineapple lilies are hardier than you might think but in colder spots cover the hefty bulbs with fern fronds or bark through winter. (Joy Plants)

epidendrum orchids. In its native Africa, the leaves follow when the weather becomes damper but for now you get a dense bouquet of stars erupting from the ground. Like many bulbs it makes an excellent cut flower but it's best not to get too close to a lit firework and this little sizzler can hold its own sending out sparks among cycads and weeping russelias. With larger trumpets almost too big for the crown of grassy leaves *Cyrtanthus 'Red Prince'* is just as arresting a red though it likes a bit less of a baking than the nerines. In really cold areas you might



Tacca chantrieri

I was bitten by this gem while visiting the Wellington Botanic Gardens' begonia house. The black bat plant is a rhizomatous plant from Thailand, Malaysia and southern China so is really a tropical forest plant and best treated as a house plant. It does make a stunning show-off piece if you can give it a lightly shaded spot and plenty of water and humidity. The rhizomes and tuberous roots can be divided in autumn.



Allium tuberosum

Chinese chives is one of my favourite late-summer bulbs because it is so neat and the clean white flowerheads – slightly flat-topped and about 40cm high in good soil – really shine out with a freshness when so much in the garden is fading. One of the last onions to flower, the leaves are neat and shorter than true chives – a perfect corner feature for path edges and patios. (Kings Seeds)



Tigridia pavonia

Nice face, shame about the legs: the Jockeys cap is such an easy Mexican bulb to grow, it can almost become a weed in light soil and a sunny spot. Each freckled flower (usually white, red or yellow) lasts just a day but successive flowers along the spikes extend the interest and the pleated leaves can look attractive too. I like it with similarly outrageous forms of bromeliads in lobster-bright racing stripes.



Haemanthus coccineus

The paintbrush lily is well named. Like many late summer bulbs, it springs out of the bare earth having entertained with broad, tongue-shaped glossy leaves months ago. There is a white species (*Haemanthus albiflos*) which is curious rather than beautiful as the flowers are a bit mean. Place this bold bulb in one of those tricky dry shade places at the foot of a tree and make room for three or four for maximum "wow" factor.

Hedychium greenii

The red butterfly ginger is a non-invasive beauty notable for its showy, scentless flowers, compact size and leaves tinted copper-brown, which complement the flowers perfectly. Protect the rhizomes from frost in winter and give it plenty of summer moisture and it will go well with delicate ferns, red lobelias, ligularias and arum lillies. (Russell Fransham)





Scadoxus multiflorus subsp. *katherinae*

This is the largest and showiest of the subspecies of this African bulb. Unlike many bulbs, scadoxus love to be in shade and enjoy plenty of water in summer.

grow it in a pot and bring it in out of the wet in winter but I have mine in the gravel between some sleeper steps where it gets plenty of air and sun and bleeds melodramatically.

The blood lily (*Haemanthus coccineus*) surely tops the bill in bulb weirdness, but it is almost too eager to please. First – like so many late-summer bulbs – it has great leaves; here they are the shape and size of a Labrador's lick. You just don't get this meatiness in a spring squill. Next it flowers in those god-forsaken dustbowls at the base of trees where nothing else will grow. This is just as well because you will want to keep the ground clear so that each paintbrush shines out as it emerges. The stems are speckled with reptilian menace – in fact all that is lacking is scent but in gardening you rarely get a full house. Other tryers for the horn department are the belladonna lilies (*Amaryllis belladonna*). These will also obligingly grow in dry shade under trees but they are all-together more feminine in outline and in hue in pinks and white.

Staying in the special effects department why not invest in a scadoxus? This is as architectural a bulb as you will get: broad leaves and a football of soft tangerine. Think clivia crossed with onion crossed with an agapanthus, but in a good way, especially if you nestle them beside a few ferns for contrast. Unlike most bulbs, scadoxus need plentiful water so be attentive under the shade of trees. Another moisture lover well worth the effort is schizostylis – now called hesperantha which is far easier to say but much less fun. This is like a demoted gladioli with the all the wind knocked from its sails and a little elegance added in.

Hesperanthas are one of the later bulbs of autumn so are especially valuable – you just have to excuse the attendant clump of leaves, which are about as tidy as a teenager's bedroom. There is a white variety but it doesn't quite have the bolshiness of the red and pink forms.

Outside of the stir-fry or the biscuit tin, gingers have a bad reputation in the garden but the red ginger (*Hedychium greenii*) has an exemplary report card. Neither too big or spready – it doesn't have the delicious smell of many of the tribe but makes up for it with petals as plump as a Mick Jagger kiss and bronzy backed leaves. The plump rhizomes will need plenty of protection in cold areas rather like the hardy heliconias which do well only in hot areas.

Heliconia subulata is one of the easiest to coax into flower. The blooms are a shadow of the true tropical sorts – a spidery scarlet and yellow helter-skelter; yet hailing from the high Andean highlands of Peru it is surely worth growing as much

because it sounds so much more well-travelled than any 'common-or-garden' canna. The leaves are strong and plentiful so in a smaller garden this can make a great substitute for a banana tree if it's the tropical resort feel you are going for. 🌱



Nerine 'Fothergillii Major'

This is a veritable firework of flame bursting out of our rockery. It has been excitingly crossed with other species, notably *Nerine bowdenii*, to produce a range of beautiful smoky colours ranging from purple to neon pinks; all make great flowers for picking. Nerines need a hot baking and great drainage. They resent disturbance but you can divide them when dormant in early summer. (greenleafnurseries.co.nz)



Hesperantha coccinea 'Major'

Another South African beauty, this has the virtue of liking damp areas and will grow happily beside a pond, making a swathe of unkempt grassy leaves. Several other colours are available and all make excellent cut flowers – rather like refined dwarf gladioli. Split the clumps every few years in spring and replant in rich loam for maximum flowers. For wild gardens, not for tidiness freaks.

PLANT PROFILE



TALK TO YOUR PLANTS



Xanthe White meets the bog primula, a plant that likes nothing better than dangling its toes in running water

PORTRAIT: EMMA BASS

Q The first time I came across you was along the banks of a stream in the Jury garden in Taranaki. It was love at first sight: a sprinkle of yellow through the grass alongside a gently ambling stream, as if it were a scene waiting to be lifted into an Impressionist painting. It must have been one of those days when the light is dancing in such a way that even a grown-up might imagine fairies are real.

A We are from a distant part of the world, in the region bordering Arunachal Pradesh, which has also been called the Paradise of the Botanist or the orchid state of India. This is a place where many cultures collide, being situated at the edge of the Himalayas right at the junction of the borders between Tibetan China, Burma, India and Bhutan. Running through this area are many rivers fed by melting Himalayan snow, the largest being Siang or Tsangpo. It is these rivers that feed the amazing plant varieties that have historically been so sought-after by plant collectors.

Q I've read stories of these great plant hunters and have imagined the enormous bravery of their early expeditions in search of plants. It's made me ponder how much we valued horticulture in those times – to risk life and limb to step into the unknown to find out more about the plant kingdom.

A Yes – and the explorers that went into this region didn't just do it alone. Major George Sherriff travelled with his wife and Labrador, and built a house as a base for his botanical study with his botanist friend Frank Ludlow. His pictures and records of plants there are still used by botanists to visit this area and survey how plant populations have changed. Because of the remoteness of this area and the rich mineral deposits brought down from the Himalayas as the snow melts, this part of the world is one of the most diverse for distinct species. This is why so many primulas are tolerant of wet feet but will also withstand periods of dry. In the wild you will find us in craggy cracks and crevices where water is seeping through mountain rock, or in valleys that are bought to life in spring by melting snow.

Q Being so popular as a bedding and garden plant, primulas have been selected and bred so you can get almost any stripe or colour combination imaginable. But why is it important to retain an interest in the origin of species?

A Species are often stronger than new cultivars but they are also really important to insects. Bees, for instance, are able to collect pollen and nectar more easily from naturally occurring specimens than from hybrids. There has been a trend among designers internationally to work more with these varieties, and even plant breeders are returning to original species to rediscover more stable varieties. But not only that: through understanding from where plants originate you can also become a better gardener. It is also a good reminder of how naturally diverse the world is.

Q Your region is at the heart of Buddhism – the Dalai Lama was once resident in the Tawang monastery there. But it also has great significance for Hindu as a place where sins were washed away, or as a place of meditation. Yet the majority of people of your area practise a religion based around nature.

A Yes – when you live in such extremities any oral traditions that might give you cues as to how weather is changing or when a season is shifting are really important. You may have to move home in different seasons so you need to know when you will be able to trade or traverse certain paths. Noticing when a rhododendron blooms or when the first primulas flush could be a matter of life and death. Some varieties of primula have medicinal uses or are an ingredient for cooking, so having an understanding of when and where they bloomed must be passed from one generation to the next. In these parts of the world the plant kingdom and people are a lot more closely connected – as once it was for all people.

Q Yes it is easy to become disconnected but talking to you gives me another perspective on the value of that bond. ❀

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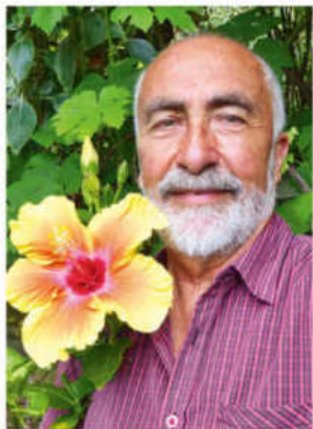
Summer's end is when things
get interesting in the garden

**KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED FOR FLOWERS
AND FOLIAGE IN RICH AND FADED HUES.**

Hydrangea should still be going strong in parts of the country, the huge flowers on lacecap forms taking on a lovely vintage shade. Look to rugosa roses for the biggest rosehips – or try a rambler like 'Wedding Day' for bunches of mini-hips. An eagle-eyed examination of untended roadsides may reveal wild flowers and grasses gone to seed – the umbelliferous form of wild fennel adds a crunchy texture to any arrangement. Spray with any metallic paint and combine with ombre autumn leaves for full dramatic effect.

PHOTO: FRIEDRICH STRAUSS/GAP PHOTOS

✂ FROM NORTH TO SOUTH ✂



74 NORTHLAND

Papayas, chestnuts, figs
linum and eucomis – our
regional experts tell us
what's on their minds

in March



76 WAIRARAPA



78 WAIKATO



80 TARANAKI



82 KAPITI COAST



84 NELSON



86 CHRISTCHURCH



88 AKAROA



90 DUNEDIN



92 SOUTHLAND



'Taitung 2'

juicy fruit

When people think of tropical holidays they usually imagine themselves on a white, sandy beach, gazing at an azure blue sea. Me, I'm dreaming of the breakfast table in the hotel

For me, a tropical holiday is all about the fruit. I spend most of the year dreaming of chunks of deep orange, ripe papaya splashed with lime juice for breakfast. And papaya-mango smoothies. Papaya and anything actually. It's torture.

It can be tricky to grow tropical papaya (*Carica papaya*) in New Zealand. They need warmth all year and if it gets coldish they will only survive if the roots stay dry. Frosts are always fatal. A hothouse is essential even in the warmest parts of Northland, although a few minutes from here I once visited a gardener growing a great crop of papayas outdoors in sandy soil against a north-facing concrete wall. He grew them in a narrow garden strip edged by a concrete path so the roots stayed warm all year. I was very impressed – in fact scarred for life, because to this day I have not matched this remarkable achievement.

Most papayas grow to 4-5 metres – too tall for most hothouses.

There are now, however, dwarf commercial varieties that start fruiting at less than 1m. The best known is the Taiwanese 'Red Lady', which has big, elongated, reddish-orange fleshed fruit and good flavour. It will fruit in a big tub as long as it stays above 15°C or so in winter. A somewhat taller variety called 'Tainung 2' grows to about 2.5m with masses of round fruit and the best flavour I've ever tasted in a papaya. Being bigger, this one needs to be in the ground in rich soil to crop well.



Carica quercifolia



'Rainbow Valley' pawpaw



'Red Lady' in situ



'Red Lady' flesh

My generous friend, Cary Wilkinson, grows both these varieties to perfection in his Kamo hothouse. When my papaya dreams get too awful I find a pretext to visit and am never disappointed. It's first aid for the tropically deprived.

Unlike tropical papaya, the common mountain papaya, *Carica pubescens*, grows quite readily outdoors in the North.

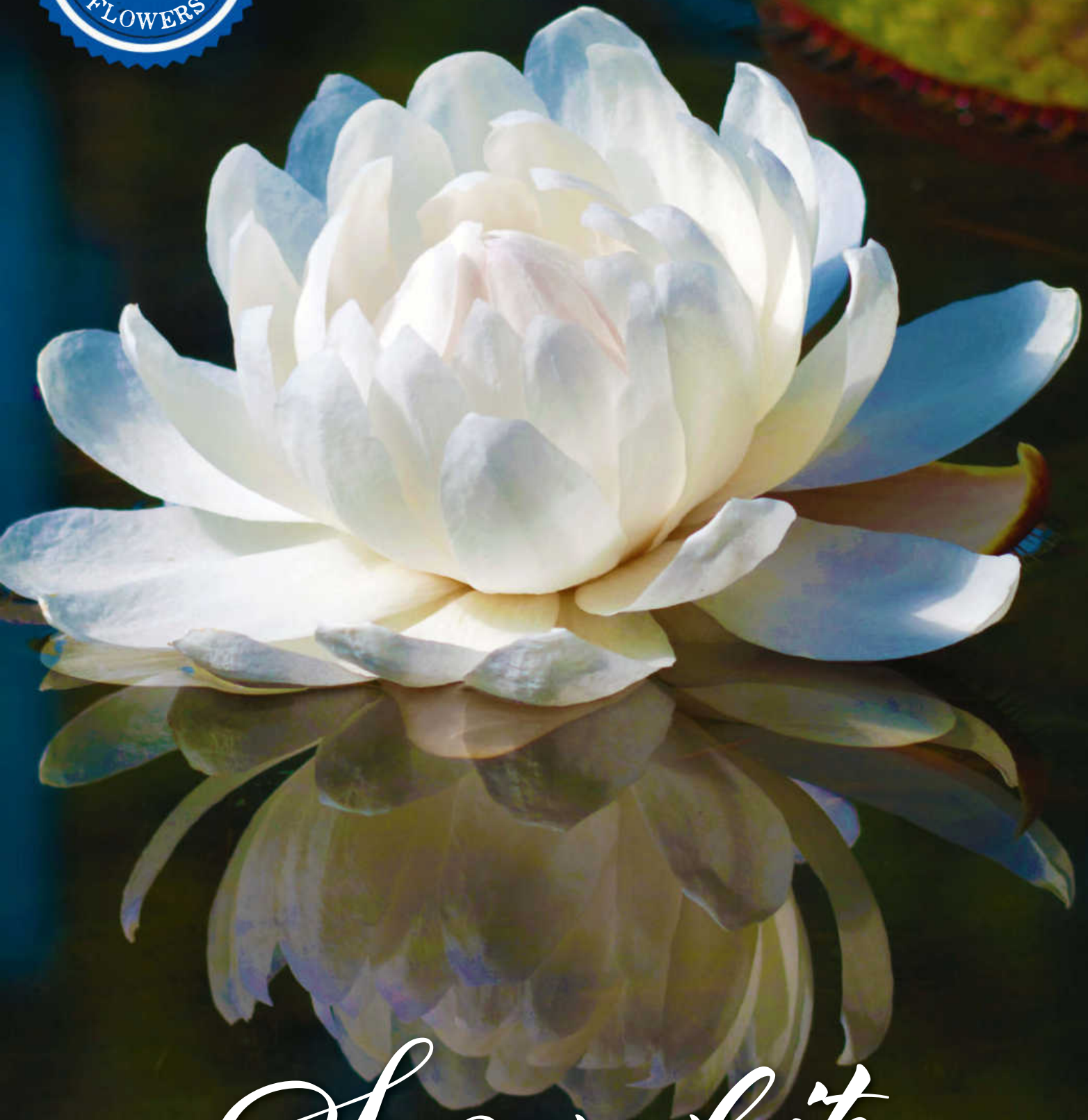
But it's a poor imitation of the tropical species and most people find it fairly unpalatable! It has rubbery, astringent flesh that in my opinion is only edible if deseeded and cooked with sugar or made into jam. Several decades ago Dick and Annemarie Endt, of Landsend in Oratia, introduced the much larger and seedless babaco, *Carica pentagona*, a cold-tolerant hybrid from Ecuador. While this grows well outdoors here and is much more palatable, many people consider it a bit insipid unless juiced or sliced, chilled and sprinkled with brown sugar overnight.

Several Northland growers have been crossing babaco with another high-altitude papaya, the toronchi, with encouraging results. The late Joe Polaischer of Rainbow Valley Farm near

Matakana created the 'Rainbow Valley' pawpaw this way, with sweeter, richer flavour than babaco. The 13cm fruit are like small babacos with seeds and the flavour is more intense than either parent.

Another impressive cold-tolerant hybrid is 'Pabachi', which is probably a babaco-toronchi cross. Its plump 20cm fruit are sweet and tasty without any of the rubbery texture of the common mountain pawpaw. These are available from Claire Leighton at Subtropica Nursery near Waipu. Claire tells me this cross was done by the Austen brothers at Exotic Nurseries near Kaitia back in the 1990s.

If you hanker after the flavour of real tropical papayas, help is at hand. The tiny, bite-sized fruit of the oak leaf papaya, *Carica quercifolia*, taste just like the big tropical ones. It grows outdoors here in a frost-free spot. The bright orange skin and flesh of these 4cm fruit is soft, sweet and delicious. I eat them seeds, skin and all, and they ripen from autumn right through winter until September. If I could just resist eating them until I get back to the kitchen I'm sure a sprinkling of lime juice would make them even better! 🌿



Snow white

Have you met what is arguably the most wonderful plant in our wonderful world of botanical treasures?

The giant Amazon water lily (*Victoria amazonica*) is the most seductive of the richly scented night bloomers. With a huge flower and a fruity fragrance likened to strawberry, pineapple or melon, this rarity is to be found blooming in heated tropical pools around the country.

Hailing from the depths of the Amazon jungle, this water lily was discovered around the time young Queen Victoria ascended the English throne when, addicted as society then was to floral symbolism, it was named *Victoria regia*.

Since reclassified as *Victoria amazonica* it captured the public imagination as it still does to this day. The other two known forms are *Victoria cruziana*, a smaller-flowered version from Santa Cruz, and a cultivar of the two known as 'Longwood Hybrid'. Although usually treated as annuals in cultivation, seeding and reappearing every year, when all three were planted in the Lady Norwood Lily House at the Wellington Botanic Gardens one did perenniate, flowering as early as August, and continued throughout summer. Warm greenhouse temperatures and the sheltered atmosphere of a heated pool are essential: a minimum of 22°C for 'Longwood Hybrid' and 25°C for *Victoria amazonica* and *V. cruziana*. 'Longwood Hybrid' has the largest blooms and is reputedly more free-flowering and hardier than its parents.

Described as “a peach within a cup”, the huge, poppy-like buds gradually expand into a snowy-white lily the size of a large cabbage. The blooms are of a punctual disposition and fleeting existence, like most night-flowering plants, disappearing beneath the dark water after only two nights. Its life may be brief but it is exquisite and fascinating.

The bud starts to waft its seductive scent on the first afternoon, two or three hours before the petals begin to expand. In the wild the resulting sight and scent attracts hordes of beetles, which burrow into its honeyed heart before becoming trapped overnight as the bloom closes its petals while they feast on the rich nectar

within. The glorious bloom gradually changes colour, blushing rosy pink as it is pollinated. After 24 hours the petals open to release the pollen-dusted workers and the flower darkens to crimson-purple before sinking back beneath the water.

Quite apart from the drama and fragrance of the flowers, the leaves are a feature in themselves.

They emerge as furled, spiny balls atop 3-metre stems. These rapidly uncurl to form large, dish-like platters the size of table tops. The upturned rims and thorny crimson undersides add to the distinction of the unique foliage which stays afloat by means of an innovative plumbing system of huge air-filled veins.

These buoyant green girders are like cantilevers arising from the centre with large bottom flanges and thin middle ribs with cross girders between each pair to prevent the middle ribs from buckling.

So inspired was Victorian architect Joseph Paxton by these green floating wonders that he based his design for a new greenhouse at Chatsworth on them and, eventually, that other wonder of the Victorian age, the Crystal Palace exhibition conservatory.

The strength and weight-bearing capacity of the leaves was demonstrated when Paxton's seven-year-old daughter Annie, weighing 19kg, was placed upon a leaf, the incident recorded in a sketch for the *Illustrated London News* in 1849. Little Annie was a mere featherweight but there is reliable evidence that a man weighing 69kg remained afloat for more than two minutes. A copper lid was used to distribute the load. Treading the leaves, which can grow to 2m, became a popular pastime. Amazing given that the surface of the leaf is so delicate that a mere straw dropped from a height of 1.5 metres will pierce it: it is the ribs set at right angles to the surface that provide the immense overall strength.

Such delicacy, such strength – and such beauty! Among the many tropical wonders Nature affords us the royal lily surely takes the crown. ❀



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Catkins are a good source of pollen

many started seeing dollar signs and planting groves.

By the late 1980s New Zealand was exporting 100 tonnes of chestnuts and paying growers up to \$10 per kilo, but the industry has since fragmented and fresh-nut exports are now limited to only a few one-off private sales.

Optimism persists and research continues, however, being focused on shelling and processing so that the starchy, kumara-like kernel can be value-added and stored for the northern hemisphere's winter – the traditional time of consumption.

Unrealised as a commercial crop it may be, but the chestnut still has a myriad of uses for Kiwi growers.

Its nuts are a high-carbohydrate, gluten-free, low-fat, nutritious food, and recipes are as numerous and varied as history itself.

Sheep and pigs will seek the starchy kernel out from the prickly burrs, and leaves, bark and the kernel's shell after processing are relished by horses, cows and even fussy alpacas – studies have shown them to be a natural anti-parasitic. I use the burrs as a rabbit-deterrent, thermal mulch around trees.

Chestnut timber is extremely durable and coppiced chestnuts are a good source of posts, which have long been used in French vineyards.

Last, but not least, in its list of attributes is the sheer beauty of this very real tree, which thrives in New Zealand conditions.

Chestnuts are also undemanding. They'll grow their large, glossy leaves

MR HANDY

A real tree is big and strong, with a trunk wide enough to hug.
A real tree has a broad, dense canopy that's a habitat for birds

Our New Zealand chestnut, *Castanea sativa* x *Castanea crenata*, is a real tree and more, adding a striking floral display in late spring, glossy leaves all summer and an edible bounty in autumn. But it goes just a bit too far. The male catkins are stunning, but they emit a scent reminiscent of old, slightly-off perfume. The nuts are tasty, healthy and highly nutritious, but are encased in malicious burrs that penetrate the toughest of garden gloves.

It is not a tree for the faint-hearted, or if you have limited space, but for those with the courage, the chestnut promises big rewards.

In fact, proponents of the crop in New Zealand suggest that chestnut's export potential equals that of kiwifruit. And the claim has some valid points.

Chestnuts have been consumed by all major cultures since time began. English, Europeans, Americans and Asians have roasted them over coals for a snack, added them to soups and stews, pureed them into desserts and used their flour in many ways. And chestnut stuffing is, of course, mandatory at any American Thanksgiving.

Add to this the increasing popularity of gluten-free chestnut flour and the ease with which the chestnut grows here, and



Tall, straight and handsome tree



Coppicing for posts

anywhere in New Zealand, although high altitudes, as well as cold or dry summers can affect nut production.

They are not afflicted by any major pests or diseases here (yet) but are susceptible to root rot (*Phytophthora*) in poorly drained or heavy soils.

A good chestnut crop usually requires cross-pollination from two trees of different varieties. Flat and empty shells inside the burrs are a sign of inadequate pollination. But if you only have space for one, the variety imaginatively named '1005' is self-fertile. This is the most popular named variety in New Zealand and produces large nuts early in the season.

Be warned, however: don't plant one beside a walkway. The prickly burrs can pierce a jandal or other light footwear and are rather painful if stepped on.

In fact, the burrs are so prickly, I have taken to collecting them with a pair of kitchen tongs.

Call me a wimp if you like, but anything less than welding gloves offers absolutely no protection!

In drier parts of the country chestnuts keep well simply laid out on trays, but warmer, more humid climates can induce mould. I collect nuts daily, cut off the pale, non-pointed end of the shell, boil for five minutes, peel, then freeze. (They remain free-flow in a bag.) They are then ready to fry with garlic, roast, add to stews and soups or use in recipes.

Dangerous? Slightly. Gorgeous? Definitely. Bountiful? Extremely. *Castanea sativa* x *Castanea crenata* is what I call a real tree. ❀

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

• **Our common New Zealand chestnut** is a hybrid of the widely grown European chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), also known as the Spanish or sweet chestnut, and *Castanea crenata*, the Japanese chestnut, which is the smaller tree but it can have larger nuts.

• **The American chestnut, *Castanea dentata***, is the largest-growing of all chestnut species. When in the 1890s America imported the more compact Chinese chestnut, *Castanea mollissima*, however, they also imported the Asian fungus chestnut blight, to which *Castanea dentata* was defenceless.

Within 50 years the American chestnut, which in some areas was the dominant forest species, had been pretty much wiped out, the result of which had a hugely negative impact on the environment and wildlife.

Since then American scientists have been trying to breed the resistance of the Chinese chestnut *Castanea mollissima* into their American chestnut, so they can re-establish eastern woodlands.

• **None of these should be** confused with the horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) of European lore, which comes from a completely different family, and whose nuts are toxic and good only for beauty and conkers.

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Fuchsia boliviana

Weed out



Cape-pondweed



Seeding bangalow



Prunus campanulata

After advocating for wildflowers on our road verges in January it is perhaps ironic that I follow up with our worst weeds

There have been times when Mark has wanted to line up and shoot our former upstream neighbour who planted cape-pondweed (*Aponogeton distachyos*, or water hawthorn). Pretty it may be in bloom, but we have been waging war on it for over a decade. Floods scoured it out upstream but it has made itself right at home in our slow-moving sections. We spend countless hours raking it out each summer because if we don't, it will only take one full season before it covers the entire water surface. Miss one piece and it grows away again at an alarming speed.

***Prunus campanulata* ranks among our worst weeds too.**

We are constantly pulling seedlings out – or digging if they have snuck through to a second season. Any older than that, and they require poisoning. I know some folk think we should get rid of all of these but the tui! The tui love it! (And please do not tell me to plant kowhai for them instead, because they don't flower at the same time and even our largest kowhai trees cannot sustain the scores of tui that frequent our early-blooming Taiwanese cherries.) So we continue to deal to the unwanted seedlings on an ongoing basis.

There is hope. Mark has been turning his attention to the sterile campanulatas we have here, because it is the seed that

is the problem. His father bred sterile campanulata hybrids – 'Pink Clouds', 'Mimosa' and 'Petite Pink'. The last variety is probably not commercially available now, which is a pity because it is a true dwarf tree. The problem with all three varieties is that they are candy pink, not the sought-after carmine red. But we have a few sterile reds with some possible options that give both flower power and nectar for the tui without the cursed seed.

The other shocker – and maybe I had better whisper this, given its popularity – is the bangalow palm.

Yes, it is handsome and reliable, but this Aussie import is far too keen to make itself at home. It took a long time for our specimens to start flowering but boy, are they a problem now. Mark tries to cut the seed off as soon as it is visible, but this requires the extension ladder and a pole saw. There is probably not a square metre left in our garden where we have yet to find a germinating bangalow. What is particularly concerning is that in the early stages they are very difficult to pick apart from seedling nikau. If you are anywhere near native bush or reserve, this is one plant that you should question having in your garden. Based on our personal experience, we recommend the queen palm (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*) as an alternative.

Mark would also like to add *Cornus capitata*, the weedy dogwood, to the do-not-plant list. His father put it all along one of the road frontages and Mark has been battling it ever since – at least it makes good firewood.

We have reviewed pretty *Fuchsia boliviana*. We acquired it before it appeared on the National Plant Pest Accord but never moved it into the garden, thank goodness. In the wilds of the "plant out" area, where some specimens can languish for years while waiting for the right spot to be found, it grew far too vigorously and the carpet of seedlings rang loud alarm bells. It is another of those plants where a sterile form would be advantageous because it flowers for months on end, is showy and has attractive foliage.

Dare I mention the wonderfully fragrant *Daphne bholua*? It is not in the same league as the others but it has certainly seeded down all round the place here. Not all the seedlings flower, either, which is not to their credit. It is another example of a plant that is highly prized internationally but can become a significant weed in our benign climate.

It can be a mighty fine line between a desirable self-seeder and a weed. Most of the plants mentioned produce berry-like seeds, which are then distributed by the birds, particularly the kereru. Plants that only seed down close to the parent are manageable, but once our feathered friends are on the loose it becomes a different matter altogether – watch out! ❀

Kapiti Coast
JULIAN
MATTHEWS
PLANTS

The painted risers are
a striking focal point
at Paloma Gardens,
near Whanganui

Living colour



Canna indica 'Warszewiczii'



Burrelli pot and mini agapanthus



Alstroemeria 'Indian Summer'

Clive and Nicki Higgie's Paloma Gardens located in Fordell, near Whanganui, are always an inspiration

So it was good to visit again this summer and catch up on new developments. Until recently, visitors sometimes missed the steps that lead to an upper garden. This was because they had started to blend with the surrounding plantings a little too well. Clive had been mulling this over when he noticed a number of half-used paint cans in the workshop. Next fine day the steps were transformed by painting the risers, which are made with concrete building blocks, in bright colours, so that no one could miss them now. It's a delight, producing a marked contrast between the unpredictable shapes and muted tones of the architectural foliage plants and the repeated shapes and bright colours of the steps.

Speaking of blending in, one of the large pots that are such a feature of Paloma has pride of place next to the pond where frogs noisily croak every summer. The terracotta pot, made at the Burrelli pottery factory that operated out of Christchurch for many years before moving to Marlborough, nestles into its surroundings in seamless fashion thanks to the surrounding planting of miniature agapanthus. A lot of the tall agapanthus have fallen from favour lately, but the mini varieties such as 'Streamline' are becoming a mainstay of summer gardens where there's a sunny bank in need of a long-flowering, easy-as-can-be groundcover planting.

The small variegated foliage agapanthus can be useful too, especially when used to emphasise bold foliage plants. I have a difficult, narrow, drought-prone strip of garden against a north-facing garage wall where variegated miniature agapanthus fill the spaces between *Agave attenuata* 'Boutin Blue', each flattering the other and both tolerant of my sometimes erratic watering in this often-neglected spot.

During the course of the summer in our garden it's always of interest to see which are the best-performing flowering plants. One that has really come into its own this year is the low-growing, slender-stemmed, elegant *Canna indica* 'Warszewiczii'. What a mouthful! I hear that Canna is being used as a girl's name nowadays – let's hope that Warszewiczii doesn't attract the interest of those hellbent on an original moniker for their unfortunate offspring.

This canna is a variety of Indian shot – once used, according to historians, as shotgun pellets when soldiers ran out of bullets during the Indian Mutiny in the 19th century. It's said that the seeds are hard enough to penetrate wood and be sufficiently intact to germinate successfully.

Those hard, black seeds are also used for jewellery, and as the mobile elements in musical instruments such as the hoshō, a gourd rattle from Zimbabwe.

But all that's just an aside, for this is a delightful component of subtropical style

gardens, its slender style ideal for mingling among bolder flowers and dramatic foliage. It grows readily from divisions and it's easy to get a group of plants established after just a few years. The flower display continues without pause for months from mid-summer until well into autumn. This summer I grew it with some old-fashioned fuchsias with very similar coloured, long, tubular flowers such as 'Mary' and 'Gartenmeister Bonstedt' and a potted petunia selected because the flowers possessed just that right shade of red. *Canna indica* 'Warszewiczii' is available from Russell Fransham Subtropicals (subtropicals.co.nz).

Another perennial deserving of a medal for long-flowering performances is the well-named *Alstroemeria* 'Indian Summer'.

It's a cross between a dwarf and a cut flower variety, resulting in tall stems of richly coloured orange and yellow flowers held above compact, enchantingly bronze coloured foliage. It outdoes the canna for long flowering performance, carrying on into winter for me. Give it reasonable soil and a sunny situation and it will be happy. As a cut flower it lasts for weeks in water.

The only disadvantage I can see with this alstroemeria is the cost. I've not seen it being sold for less than \$30, but I figure I'd rather have one top-quality plant than three mediocre ones, so I tell myself it's worth the price.

In our garden it's used as a foreground to red and orange cannas, mingling happily with gaillardias, the sunshine-yellow daylily (*Hemerocallis*) 'Buttered Popcorn', which is a good new variety, and dwarf agapanthus 'Blue Opal' for a bit of contrast. 🌸



FIG DREAMS

When I moved to Nelson a decade ago I didn't know my fig from my finger, figuratively speaking

They were in the same category as prunes, with purgative connotations that didn't flick my switch at all. Little did I know I'd soon be growing and enthusing about both fruit.

My fig education began on a late summer field trip to the magical Mariri garden of George Christofski. I probably only spent an hour trailing along behind George with the other visitors, but my eyes were opened forever to the wonders of figs. George had over 50 fig trees and generously plucked fruit for us to taste as we toured the property. Succulent, sun-ripened figs were a revelation: the total opposite to the dried, brown, gritty discs I had previously known.

The good news is that figs do well in frost-free parts of the country with warm summers. Years that we enjoy a long, hot summer produce the best crops, as the main harvest for most varieties is in those mellow late-summer months. Some varieties also produce an early harvest in December and January, known as a breba crop, which grows from small green fruit that wintered over on the tree. These first figs don't usually have the same succulent flavour as the late summer ones but they also tend to be impressively large. I like to use them for a savoury fig and red onion jam that is perfect with blue cheese.

The bad news is that birds love figs. Over the years I've employed various strategies to get that perfect tree-ripened fig. Netting the whole tree is the most effective method, but easier said than done if it is a large one. In the past, I have made hankies of fine mesh and tied them over each fruit. This season I used latex gloves with the fingers cut for ventilation, but I like Waikato columnist Sheryn Clothier's idea of using little zip-lock bags with a few holes in over each fruit. Bags would make it easier to see which ones are ripe, and I'll be trying it next season.



A breba crop on 'Preston Prolific'

There are many varieties of fig tree on the market and you are best to find ones growing well in your area before selecting a variety to plant. Here are some general pointers on three of the main families:

- **As a rule, the purple-skinned figs** with red flesh, known as Malta types, do well in warmer climates. They have smaller fruit, ripen mid- to late-season and some will continue ripening after you pick them. Their flavour is spicy and sweet and they also dry very well.
- **The sugar fig varieties** are squat with green to brown skin and yellow to pink flesh. They produce an early crop, do well in cooler climates and are very sweet.
- **Adriatic fig varieties** are green-skinned with cherry-red flesh. The fruit is longer and firmer than sugar figs. They ripen later and have magnificent flavour when fully ripe but need a long summer.

Since that first visit to George's figs, I've planted two of his favourite varieties, 'Macedonian' and 'Italian Black'. Both are doing well and the 'Italian Black' is in the warmest most sheltered spot I could find for it. Also, a 'Preston Prolific', which lives up to its name and has an impressive early crop. There is also a large tree planted by earlier owners – an Adriatic variety, I believe – on which I have practised pruning strategies. (Figs can get very large – read my pruning tips, right.)

Two of my favourite ways of eating fresh figs are with runny honey and yogurt and in a salad with mint and basil leaves. And yes, they do have one of the highest fibre counts of any fruit so they are deserving of their reputation! ❀



Adriatic figs need a long summer



A latex glove deters greedy birds

PRUNING GUIDE

- **Do major pruning in late winter** before the sap is flowing and paint all large cuts with anti-fungal pruning paint.
- **If you are trying to reduce** and reinvigorate an old tree only remove a third of the old wood each winter.
- **Main crop fruit** is usually borne on this season's growth, so annual pruning ensures vigour and new fruiting growth.
- **You can either** cut branches back to a node or remove at the base to promote new shoots. This latter approach keeps the tree low and easier to net.
- **If you already have** a single trunk and you're just shortening branches, keep the canopy open by thinning complete branches. Don't snip off all the end buds as this is where the fruit forms!



Linum usitatissimum

STACKS OF FLAX



Blame Captain Cook.
He was the first to refer
to harakeke, also known
as *Phormium tenax* or
Phormium cookianum, as flax



Kiwi flax (*Phormium tenax*)



Linum perenne seedlings

This act doomed generations of Kiwis, me among them, to believe that the linen tablecloths that are so demanding to iron, the linen tea towels that are peerless removers of lint on glasses, and the linen shirts so favoured by respectable matrons of all ages were all contrived somehow from those leathery, sword-shaped leaves of our New Zealand flax.

In fact, the flax from which linen comes could hardly be more different than our hefty, clump-forming phormiums. The northern hemisphere flax is the mainly delicate *Linum* genus, which has about 200 species. Most are graceful perennials, with simple and pretty cup-shaped flowers in blues, mauves, pinks, reds and yellows.

The one most commonly available here is *Linum perenne*. A native of most of Europe, and also known as perennial flax, it comes in a brilliant blue or equally intense cerise, making it an excellent addition to the home garden. I grow mine from seed, scattering them in a sunny spot in well-drained, even dryish soil, where they will flower uncomplainingly for weeks, growing up to 45cm tall. Although classed as a perennial, I have found it short-lived. Mine have never managed to survive into the new season but, all going well, they will self-seed to produce more of their cheerful 1cm blooms the following season. The ease with which it grows is reflected in its sustainability rating above the other major plant-based fabric, cotton; linums need fewer pesticides and water, growing happily as they do in cooler climates.

Linums are also found here outside the seed catalogues and domestic gardens. North of the Waikato, *Linum trigynum*

grows in dry wastelands and coastal areas. This native of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor and northern Iran has tiny yellow flowers and grows only to 45cm high.

Another, more spindly species, *Linum bienne*, grows wild along roadsides and wastelands throughout the North Island and eastern South Island. It grows to about 80cm high and its pale blue flowers are visible from summer into autumn. This unassuming weed is the same flax that the Romans cultivated and used to make linen.

The linen that is grown today in the fields of Europe, however – a sight in full, bright-blue bloom seldom forgotten – is more likely to be *Linum usitatissimum*. So long has it been cultivated and naturalised throughout the northern hemisphere (dyed flax fibres have been found in a prehistoric cave in Georgia dating back 36,000 years ago) that its origins are unclear; Central Asia is considered most likely.

The ancient Egyptians are thought to have developed an annual variety, and until the Crusades, Egyptian linen was considered the best, and its lawn hailed as the finest of the fine. North-west Russia and the Baltic countries now produce about 90 per cent of the world's flax; and aficionados can argue till the sun goes down about which region produces the finest linen.

New Zealand, meanwhile, has a native linum, *Linum monogynum*.

A short-lived coastal plant, rauhuia or kaho forms a soft bush about 50cm high with spear-shaped, leathery, grey-green leaves and white flowers up to 2.5cm diameter. It prefers a sunny spot in light soil, though will tolerate shade. The presence of this plant helps beggar the question why Cook

and his then-botanist Joseph Banks in 1770 called a plant that is a member of the agave family, with no obvious similarities to northern hemisphere flax, flax.

The answer perhaps lies in etymology. The two explorers observed Maori using a plant that Reinhold and Georg Forster, the father and son botanists on the captain's second voyage in 1772, were to name *Phormium tenax* – phormium from the Greek “phormos”, meaning a basket, and the Latin “tenax” meaning strong.

Cook said of the Maori weavers: “Of the leaves of these plants, with very little preparation, they make all their common apparel; and of these they make also their strings, line and cordage.” In naming it flax he was alluding to its use as a fibre, rather than its botanical characteristics. For the word flax is derived from the Old English “flæks”, and related to the Latin “plectere” and Greek “plekein” – to plait, or twist.

Describing someone as flaxen-haired refers not to flax's colour when it is ready to be harvested.

(That is, a glorious gold.) Rather, it refers to the colour after it has been prepared for spinning. Traditionally, the whole plant is pulled (to get as long a fibre as possible) then left outside for several days before being submerged under running water for several more. This process, called retting, renders the stalks a pale white. Then the stalks are beaten and scraped, resulting in a product resembling long, blonde hair.

This is then spun – since the 1770s by machine, but prior to that by hand, which almost makes me tempted to have a go. At a production rate of a teatowel of linen per square metre of plants, I could almost keep my family in lint-free glasses for ever. ❀



'Jacqueline du Pré'



'William Lobb'

When Sir Tim Rice wrote:
"Looking back I could have
played it differently" for
the musical *Chess* I don't think
he had gardeners in mind

But it applies nevertheless. Most of the time we look at our gardens and count our blessings but it's a rare gardener who doesn't, just now and then, wish it were all very different.

We can pine for gardens that never happened just as bitterly as we might pine for a lost love. And right now I am pining for the garden that might have been: for long lawns and topiary, lashings of clipped box, tall dark hedges and a smattering of elegant trees – bare branches in winter, of course.

There would be roses – a select grouping here and there, but not too many and nothing too fluffy.

Fragrance would be a plus and a couple of Moss roses would make a good start. These are heavily fragrant old roses, mostly belonging to the Centifolia family, with buds and sometimes stalks and leaflets covered in what looks like moss. It can be soft and downy or stiff and whiskery, but it is always an interesting addition to the packaging.

if only...



'Chapeau de Napoléon'



'Brother Cadfael'



'Aloha'

There are quite a few Moss roses still in the catalogues so it would be hard to choose, but I couldn't resist 'William Lobb', a sumptuous jewel of a rose with soft, mossy buds that open to velvet-petalled crimson-purple flowers.

I would also want 'Chapeau de Napoléon' because it is just so beautiful, and quirky with it. It gets its name because the fringed and mossy sepals that project from the buds resemble the three-cornered hats Napoleon wore. Flowers are large and luscious, full-petalled pink, fading to silvery mauve.

'William Lobb' is a moderate climber to about 3 metres, and 'Chapeau de Napoléon' is a bushy plant of about 1 metre. Both are spring and summer flowering, and I would take David Austin's advice and buy three plants of each variety. One plant is all very well, but three planted in a loose triangle are three times the pleasure and can never be overlooked.

There would also be a long, dark wall somewhere. Along it I would plant the magnificent 'Brother Cadfael' – perhaps ten plants, or more (dreams are free!) The rose was introduced by David Austin in 1990 and the flowers must be the largest of all his roses. Heavily scented blooms are a gentle clear pink, deepening in the centre, fully double, deeply cupped, globular and paeony-like. It's a rose to take your breath away and make you wonder if perhaps it is just too big, but it grows to a substantial bush and the flowers don't look out of proportion.

The name comes from the detective novels by Edith Pargeter, who wrote under the name Ellis Peters, which feature Brother Cadfael, a fictitious 12th-century Benedictine monk with an uncanny ability to solve mysteries.

There has to be a climber or two to shin up those tall, dark trees.

There I would plant 'Aloha' – not to be confused with a yellow Hybrid Tea of the same name. This 'Aloha' is a sport of 'New Dawn', which was hugely popular a few years ago, but not nearly as rampant and much more interesting. Flowers are large with a velvety bloom to the petals. You could call it rose pink with a deeper reverse but there are shades of magenta and salmon too, which lift it out of the ordinary. It's slow to climb but you have a glorious shrub while you wait. It's also extremely hardy and can cope with shade.

There should probably be a bank of white roses somewhere – but nothing as common as the reliable 'Iceberg'. 'Jacqueline du Pré', named for the cellist, should be sufficiently exquisite. Clusters of semi-single blooms with a hint of cherry-red deep in the stamens are charming. Flowers repeat and the shrub is vigorous and healthy.

That's my dream garden for the moment.

Not so much delusions of grandeur as a touch of boredom with the familiar. 'Celtic Cream', which I have praised in the past, has been a disappointment this year and taught

me that Hybrid Teas do need to be hard pruned and sprayed. If flowers were faces, my 'Celtic Cream' would look at me disdainfully, all the while dribbling black spot and rust down their leaves. Not a pretty sight. ❀

MARCH TO-DO LIST

- **Continue to summer prune.** Cut back those long, untidy canes. It will make winter pruning so much easier.
- **We've had crazy weather** this summer. Make sure the soil around the roses hasn't become compacted. Carefully loosen it with a fork or hoe.
- **Sprinkle a handful** of potash around the dripline and gently fork it in to ensure strong canes in spring.
- **Look closely at foliage.** Unless you are a manic sprayer it is probably marked with black spot by now but if the leaves are yellow, it could be due to a magnesium deficiency in the soil. To combat this, dissolve a scant teaspoon of Epsom Salts in a litre of water and pour around the dripline.
- **Deadheading is optional** this month. There is no point in deadheading roses that finish flowering at the end of summer but with roses that keep on blooming until winter, deadheading will keep them to task.
- **It's not too early** to order new roses from specialist nurseries. Popular varieties sell out quickly.



Agapanthus africanus

Take the heat

There was a day this summer when the garden got fried.
We'd had our usual sort of Dunedin weather up until then

There were some nice, soft, sunny days, days that were a little grey, with coastal or high-altitude mist or both, which we complained about. There was drizzle which we complained about too. Then there was a sizzling day with searing sunshine and temperatures in the 30s. I stayed inside. The poor garden had no choice but to endure this sudden, unusual heat. Plants from lush mountain pastures such as the giant Himalayan lily and veratrum might be expected to suffer sunburn, but stranger was that the groundcover *Pachysandra terminalis*, Canary Island ivy and buxus burnt, for goodness sake! It's hotter where these last three plants originate. But our usual gentle climate had encouraged soft, sappy growth. The garden took on a cooked look with swathes of withered and brown, splotched leaves.

Was this weather event a oncer? Will it happen again? Do I need to rethink the planting at Larnach Castle garden? A plant that came through the heat event with flying colours, literally, was the South African agapanthus. I know up North it's regarded as a weed, though I agree with Taranaki columnist Abbie Jury's January story: a lusty agapanthus with summer-blue flowers has a better look than dead stuff on the side of the road. Down here it's not a pest anyway. Some years ago I planted a steep, north-facing slope with hundreds of agapanthus. Some were purchased as tube stock and others given by friends. I'd had a tip from a volunteer at Pukeiti, the great Taranaki garden: agapanthus can be sprayed over with glyphosate at 0.75% (water down to

the recommended strength, then add a quarter as much water again). This brew will kill other growth but not agapanthus. Ease of maintenance was an issue with this steep bank. Agapanthus did the job.

My aggies are evergreen except for one purchased as Agapanthus 'Storm Cloud'. Its flowers, of a deep moody blue, are poised atop elegant, tall, 1m stems. I purchased another in Auckland with some fancy name. It looked the same as 'Storm Cloud'. I had previously given the cultivar to Liz Morrow for her garden, Omaio at Matakana. I arrived again at Omaio with this newly purchased plant. I wanted to see if it was different. I tipped it out of its pot; saw Liz's expression of joy. "Don't get too excited," I said. "You're only getting half of this." I chopped it, took half home and we both agreed that it was the same plant as 'Storm Cloud'. It's best to acquire a plant in flower as it doesn't match descriptions in overseas books.

Eucomis are called the pineapple flower because of the tuft of leaves atop the raceme. This deliciously different South African bulb struts its stuff just as midsummer displays become tired. Both the cream flowers and the leafed toupée of the *Eucomis bicolor* are crisply edged with maroon. *Eucomis comosa* 'Sparkling Burgundy' is worth growing just for its spiky, maroon foliage. Its purple-budded flowers open cream fading to maroon; a firecracker of a plant. My eucomis are in sunny, light, well-drained soil. They come from regions that are winter dry, with summer rains. ❀



Agapanthus on Otago Peninsula



Striking, spiky eucomis



Eucomis bicolor



An old Bird-man costume will hopefully deter birds from Robert's crops



TWEET REVENGE

I've just made the ultimate bird-scarer and I'm calling it Thunderbird. That's because harvest time and hungry birds go hand in wing



Gather rosehips for syrup



Harvesting with an old laundry basket

When the plums are ripe, the wood pigeons swoop in. When the apples are giving off their most alluring "eat me" fragrance, the silver-eyes and bellbirds arrive en masse to hollow them out. Popular bird-scaring devices are all but useless; flashing tapes, spinning discs and dangling mirrors are a joke. Scarecrows are worthless (sorry, Worzel) and black "crow" kites are effective only while novel; birds soon learn to ignore their impotent swooping. But now there is the Thunderbird. At 3m high and wide, all primary yellow, red and blue, tasseled and barred like a Sioux Indian brave, the Thunderbird strikes fear into every feathered fruit-thief. It's a scarecrow, shiny discs, tapes and mirrors all in one gigantic, gaudy bird of prey.

Originally made from inflatable lilos and insulation tape for a Bird-man contest many years ago – second place! – the Thunderbird has lain rolled-up and waiting for a chance to serve its true purpose. Just this week I realised what that was.

Suspending it between the tallest trees in my forest-garden wasn't easy, but it sent every bird packing and frightened my chickens to boot. Does it look natural among the trees, vines and herbs? Not at all, and that's the point. Birds can't miss it. And does it work, I imagine you asking? I couldn't say. It did for starters, but I know birds aren't silly. They'll soon work out that though big, the Thunderbird isn't mobile. I've netted everything anyway – apples, pears and plums, blueberries, Chilean wineberries, Chinese dogwoods and sea-buckthorn – so once the fright has passed and hunger emboldens the birds and prompts them to try their luck, they'll be foiled by those reliable wrappings.

March is the end of the harvest season and should be redolent with juicy fruits and crisp nuts. If you've fed your fruiting plants well, watered them religiously and protected them from kea and kaka, possums and neighbourhood children, you'll be picking and preserving as fast as you are able.

We employ containers of all sorts to carry the harvest from garden to kitchen: expired wicker laundry baskets, wooden boxes, bags woven from hemp string or harakeke. We've also some vintage canvas apple-picking bins that hang from the pickers' necks and shoulders as well as their modern, synthetic equivalents. Whatever you use, fill them gently if you want your harvest to last. Bruised apples, pears and plums store badly if bashed. Some export-focused fruit-growers insist that their pickers wear white gloves. Me, I don't mind spots, bumps and scrapes.

Foraging for wild foods in March is a favourite hobby of mine. Though there's far too few foragables in and around New Zealand towns compared with other parts of the world, there's still a harvest to be had if you look for it. I collect rosehips at this time of the year and make them into syrup in case I am pursued by a cold during the winter months.

Rugosa roses have the biggest hips, but it's the wild briars I like to gather, as they are more intense and flavoursome and, I expect, contain higher levels of vitamin C. They're devils to pick though, with thorns that like to be remembered for days afterwards. A sensible person would wear gloves while harvesting briar rosehips. I dig the thorns out with a needle over the following weeks.

Seeds need to be collected and stored now. If there's anything left on your annuals and biennials, the wind hasn't taken them, nor the birds, wait for a dry mid-morning and head outside to collect the beginnings of next spring's garden. Watch for insects hitching a ride and separate them off if you can. If not, put the seeds in the freezer for a couple of days. This should kill any bugs, while the seeds will laugh the brief chilling off.

I store my seeds in glass jars now; it's the best insurance against nibbling creatures that might like to dine on your treasures. Plus it's so much easier to see what's inside. The only drawback is that some seeds deteriorate under the influence of UV light, so once they are safely inside their jars, put everything into a dark place. A cupboard is ideal.

Next month will be cooler than this one, unless El Niño has a surprise up her sleeve. Newly sown seeds won't need to be protected from the heat and dry quite so carefully and they sprout more slowly as a result. The tunnelhouse will again provide a venue for seed-raising where previously it was best suited for cooking them. Don't be tempted, as I unfailingly am, to reuse seed-raising mix that has already raised cabbages or lettuce. Splash out on fresh mix to ensure that no bugs are transferred to your new seedlings and any that do sprout have something to eat once they've made a showing. The nutrients in seed-raising and potting mix flush away when watering is regular, and have to be re-introduced in the form of liquid fertilizer. It's better to start anew with fresh mix, or with a sieved serving of compost made at home. ❀

TRAVEL

Proudly supplied by



A Italian fountain, rescued from a UK salvage yard, is the centrepiece of the secret walled garden at Fernside, just north of Featherston

A gardener's road trip to Wairarapa

Blessed with a hot, dry climate and cold winters, visitors to this food and wine hot spot will discover horticultural treasures aplenty



Staff writer Barbara Smith lists 16 attractions for gardeners in Wairarapa



Awaiti, which is Maori for "little stream", was named after

the meandering brook on the homestead property

Home of the first Arbor Day trees planted in New Zealand and the birthplace of our most famous apple, Wairarapa has a fantastic climate for gardeners and visitors alike.

1 ADMIRE A SUPERB HISTORIC HOMESTEAD AND GARDEN

Fernside is a lovingly restored, Heathcote Helmore-designed, Georgian-style property set in 20 acres of landscaped gardens. Built in 1924, but neglected after the original owners died, Fernside was bought by Colin and Rosie Bevan in 2007. Inspired by British heritage gardens and with the help of a team of five gardeners, the Bevans have worked hard to restore Fernside to its former glory. There's a rhododendron walk, a knot garden and glorious perennial borders. An added bonus is spotting locations used in scenes from *The Lord of the Rings*. You can visit Fernside in a group, by appointment; email rbevan@fernside.co.nz.

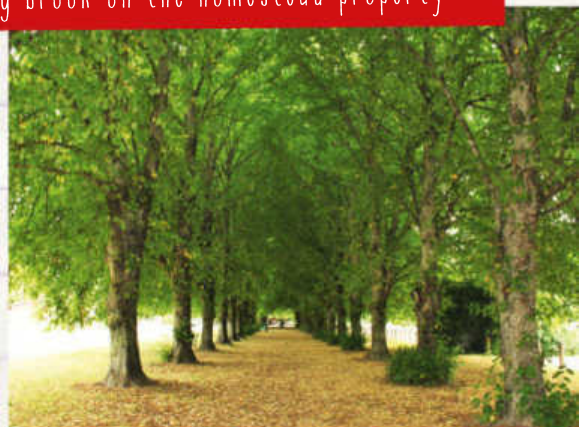
2 DECIDUOUS TREES STAR AT AWAITI GARDENS, MASTERTON

This is a formal 2.4ha all-seasons garden, although the autumn colour of its large collection of trees is a particular highlight. Starting in the early 1980s, Jeanette and Allan Gates hand-built all the brick and stone colonnades that give the garden its mature look. More info and booking details at awaitigardens.co.nz.



3 PICK UP A GORGEOUS GIFT OR PLANTS AT GRAND ILLUSIONS

Designer Craig Thorburn has set up shop in a 1880s cottage next to the White Swan Hotel on Greytown's main street. Unique, botanically inspired homewares and gardening items from around the world as well as locally made sculptural pieces and decorative items are crammed into every corner. The charming garden is full of cottage garden plants, many of which are for sale. Craig designed Ellerslie Flower Show display gardens and retail areas for 12 years, winning many awards along the way. Email grandillusions@slingshot.co.nz for more information.



Clockwise from top: The Dancing Girl statue above a bed of white begonias at Awaiti Gardens; the Soldier's Memorial avenue of lime trees in Greytown; tempting treasures for your garden at Grand Illusions, Greytown

4 TAKE A WALK TO SEE GREYTOWN'S HISTORIC TREES

The first Arbor Day in New Zealand was held in Greytown in 1890, when 150 trees were planted. A few still survive and many more notable exotics and natives have since joined them. In 1856, Samuel Oates carried 12 *Eucalyptus regnans* seedlings over the Rimutakas in a wooden wheelbarrow. While he rested in the Greytown pub, three seedlings were pinched and planted around town. Today the sole survivor dominates the main street. Pick up the heritage tree trail map at the i-site or download from treesofgreytown.co.nz.



5 VISIT A BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL HILLTOP GARDEN

A dramatic 11.5ha property designed around its spectacular site on the steep hills behind Gladston, Assisi Gardens is rated as nationally significant by the NZ Gardens Trust. Huge lawns contrast with swathes of tussock, native grasses and flax interspersed with sculpture. Visit by appointment only, assisigardens.co.nz.

6 MEET THE NATIVES (& EXOTICS) AT KAHIKATEA GARDENS

Take a guided tour to see a 900-year-old kahikatea, flowering trees and stables filled with treasures of farming history. Stop along the way to pet the sheep, alpacas, donkeys and miniature horses. Bookings essential, kahikateagardens.co.nz.

7 BUY SPECIAL PERENNIALS AT WAIRARAPA FARMERS' MARKET

Angie Surman loves propagating the unusual and hard-to-find plants that were the backbone of her family's perennial garden. Determined to find these again, she scoured the gardens of old homesteads and collected seed from trusted friends and locals. She also imports seed and grows on her seedlings to a plantable, hardened-off PB2 size. She's at the market from September to December or look for Mole Green Nursery on Facebook.

8 SAVE THE DATE: WAIRARAPA GARDEN TOUR IN NOVEMBER

Every year the cream of local private and public gardens open for the Wairarapa Garden Tour. Funds raised support Pukaha Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre. This year's tour is November 12-13, see wairarapagardentour.co.nz

9 DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF OUR MOST FAMOUS APPLE

In the 1940s Greytown man James Hutton Kidd sent seedlings from his apple-breeding to be evaluated by the DSIR. His D8 seedling was marketed as 'Gala', and for years was New Zealand's most important commercial apple. There's a good display on Kidd at Greytown's Cobblestones Museum, cobblestonesmuseum.org.nz.

Clockwise from top left: The Big Apple is one of many roadside fruit and veg stalls; Neil and Greg Montgomerie-Crowe take tour groups through Kahikatea Gardens; the summer house at The Landing; the Kiwi House at Pukaha Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre, a short drive north of Masterton; *Primula vialii*, from Mole Green Perennials



Swamp cypresses (*Taxodium distichum*) have established quickly beside the pond at Assisi Gardens



Nestled in its hilltop eyrie, Assisi Gardens enjoys sweeping views across the Wairarapa countryside and abounds in attractive natives and ornamentals



The gardens at Carrington House in Carterton date back to 1874 and were designed by renowned landscape architect Alfred Buxton

10 MARK THE SEASONS AT STONEHENGE AOTEAROA

Whether you plant by the moon or not, there's plenty to interest gardeners here. Richard Hall and the Phoenix Astronomical Society have built an open-sky observatory on a similar scale to Stonehenge in England, specifically designed for its location near Carterton. Modern scientific knowledge combines with ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Celtic, Polynesian and Maori starlore to show the calendar of the seasons. There's a garden too, in spite of the exposed hilltop site and lack of water – Kay Leather grows tough wildflowers and bulbs that put on a colourful display. Kay propagates native trees from seed and has a veggie garden too. The guided tours are highly recommended – and do allow extra time for the displays in the shop and the video presentation, see stonehenge-aotearoa.co.nz.

11 STOCK UP ON PLANTS AT CLAREVILLE NURSERY

Wairarapa columnist Kerry Carman's favourite garden centre is just north of Carterton. Established by former NZG contributor Faye Portman, it is now run by Steven and Louisa Portman. They have supplied special plants to collectors for years and carry an excellent range of the usual garden staples and a nice collection of pots. Check out their Facebook page for specials.

12 FILL THE BOOT WITH POTTED COLOUR AND PERENNIALS

Near the turnoff to Stonehenge at 296 State Highway 2 is Down to Earth, a road-side stall that fills the entire front garden! Take your pick and pay at the honesty box.

13 EXPLORE 140 YEARS OF HOUSE & GARDEN HISTORY

Carrington House Historical Gardens spreads over nearly 5ha and is filled with a succession of colour from bluebells and daffodils in early spring, followed by rhododendrons, roses, dahlias, autumn leaves in the arboretum and camellias. Open to groups by appointment; see carringtongardens.co.nz for info.

14 STAY IN STYLISH SURROUNDS AT THE LANDING

Get away for a romantic weekend or visit the gardens with established oaks, crab apple trees and sweeping lawns at this elegant wedding venue. Five minutes from Masterton, it's an ideal base while exploring the Wairarapa; thelanding.net.nz.



Clockwise from top left: Summer solstice at Stonehenge Aotearoa; Martinborough Fair fills the square; Brancepeth is a time capsule of old time farming on a grand scale



15 BUY LOCAL PRODUCE AT THE MARTINBOROUGH FAIR

A multitude of stalls displaying vintage products, clothing, art, handmade textiles, fresh produce, gourmet foods and local wine will radiate out from the Martinborough Square on March 5. Held on the first Saturday of February and March each year, the Rotary-organised fairs have been attracting people to the wine village since the late 1970s, see martinboroughfair.org.nz.

16 IMAGINE COLONIAL LIFE IN A STATION HOMESTEAD

Brancepeth Station once had 300 staff, a grand stable, library, school, store and cookhouse, and now has the highest NZ Historic Places Trust rating. The gardens contain the first tri-coloured flax in the world and 140-year-old trees. Species include totara, ginkgo, Sherwood oak, peppermint gum and bunya pine. Group bookings by appointment, brancepeth.co.nz, 06 372 2876. ❖

WHAT ELSE SHOULD GARDENING VISITORS SEE?

These are just a few of our favourite places to visit around Wairarapa. If you know of any other must-see gardening destinations, email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz or post to NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. The best entry will win McGregor's tools including a fork and spade, rake, bypass secateurs, pop-up bag, pruning saw and seed packets. Entries close May 1, 2016.



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MARCH

Gardening odds & sods

Bulbs and plants to buy now, an award-winning iris, your gardening problems solved, vege animal craft for kids, plus a review of the latest Trotts Garden book

BULBS



TULIPA 'WHITE PERFECTION'

is a stunning, crown-shaped tulip with pure white, wavy petals. A very hardy specimen, it flowers late in the season after most other tulips have finished. Height: 50-60cm. From Bulbs Direct.



TULIPA 'MARMALADE'

is a single tulip that has soft, red petals with a yellow rim. It is a hardy variety with superb disease resistance, and the blooms appear on 55cm-high stems. From Bulbs Direct.



IXIA 'GIANT'

produces a multitude of long-lasting white flowers with purple tips and purple centres. A great cut flower that blooms from late spring to early summer. It grows to a height of 65cm. From NZ Bulbs.



IXIA 'YELLOW EMPEROR'

produces a colourful display in the summer garden with its mimosa-yellow blooms and wine-red centres. It needs a sunny, well-drained position to thrive. Early summer flowering. Height: 65cm. From NZ Bulbs.

NEW



SUMMERINA 'TWILIGHT'

is a brand new plant – a cross between *Rudbeckia hirta* and *Echinacea purpurea* 'Twilight' – with a focus on increased hardiness and longevity and flowering all summer long. Grow in full sun to part shade. Height to 60cm.



SUMMERINA 'SUNSHINE'

is another new plant in the Summerina range, a cross between *Rudbeckia hirta* x *Echinacea purpurea* 'Sunshine'. Look out too for Summerina 'Sunflare', which has orange-gold flowers. Summerinas enjoy sun to part shade. Water regularly for new plants or if they are in a container, where there is a greater risk of drying out.



WORLD-LEADING BREEDER

Iris breeder Alison Nicoll, from Richmond Irises, has been awarded the New Zealand Dykes Medal for her Tall Bearded iris 'Atavus'

The Dykes Medal is awarded by the British Iris Society every second year to an iris bred here by a New Zealand breeder. Dykes medals are also awarded in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States.

The NZ Iris Society manages the test and trial gardens where new varieties are grown over several years. The flowers, stems, plant vigour and ability to increase are all taken into account. Judging takes place over several years and in more than one locality.

Only one New Zealand Dykes Medal can be awarded at a time and it is not always awarded. 'Atavus' is the fourth New Zealand iris to receive the award.

Hybridising irises has increased in New Zealand since 1999, when importing plant material became extremely complex and expensive. In fact, no new irises have been

imported since 2000. Instead, enthusiastic NZ Iris Society members have turned their hands to producing new irises for gardeners. Seed donated by overseas hybridisers increases the gene pool for local breeders and encourages new members to "dabble in pollen". The end result should be more iris colours and forms available to the public.

The complex task of judging new varieties is only possible because the society organises the test and trial gardens and provides training. The society is also a source of judges for local, national and international iris and flower shows.

The awarding of the Dykes Medal in New Zealand is confirmation that New Zealand breeders can produce world-class irises. Alison Nicoll is delighted that her 'Atavus' has achieved this recognition.

RARE PLANT



A rare trillium, *Trillium grandiflorum* 'Flore Pleno' is now available from Hawea grower Jamie Urquhart. As a 25-year-old, Jamie had the foresight to see a rare plant given to him by his plant-enthusiast mother Maryed would be a good long-term investment.

Jump forward 35 years and Jamie has cultivated a stunning crop of what potentially could be the world's largest stock of the double white *Trillium grandiflorum* f. *polymerum* 'Flore Pleno', also known as 'Snowbunting'.

"We used to run a plant nursery here in Hawea for 20 years and we had all sorts of varieties of trillium in various colours. But this one is special," says Jamie. "This is the jewel of them all."

First discovered in New York in the 1920s, 'Flora Pleno' has a gardenia-like, multi-layered bloom in mid-spring and is best planted in woodland where there is light shade and moisture. After the flower dies off the sturdy, three-fingered leaves offer some greenery for a time before becoming dormant in late summer. New shoots appear early the next spring. "To see them flower en masse in spring is quite a sight to behold. I might be a bit of a romantic," Jamie confesses, "but even just one on its own is stunning. You can only divide each plant once every five years. This has certainly been a labour of love and patience."

A limited number of plants has been released for sale. For more information, visit the Facebook page NZ Trillium Stockist and, if you wish to order one, email trilliumnook@yahoo.com or see their listings on Trade Me.

Anna van Riel



SCULPTURE ON SHOW

Take a walk through new outdoor sculptures by 42 leading artists, set in picturesque native bush with a backdrop of city and harbour views. The Harbourview Sculpture Trail on Te Atatu Peninsula, Auckland is open daily from March 5-28. Enjoy the interactive kids' "Creation Station" or add to your collection at the onsite shop. On Friday and Saturday evenings, there will be gourmet food trucks and entertainment. More info at harbourviewsculpture.com.



Plant doctor

Q **GROW POHUTUKAWA**
My seeds haven't germinated.
Does Geoff Canham (who was in NZG's December issue) have any tips?
 ALLISON SMITH, MANAWATU

A Collecting pohutukawa seed is fun and the time to do this is soon. The fine seed is ready to be released from their seed capsules from March through to May or June. Stand back a little and tap on a lower branch to see if any seed falls off. If it does, place a bag or a bucket over the capsules and shake the seed inside. Do this clear of the tree's dripline; seed falling on you becomes itchy!

Sow fresh seed as soon as possible in seed trays of standard potting mix. A very finely sieved covering of mix on the sown seed, merely the thickness of the seed itself, works

well although we've had equal success with simply sowing on top of the tray of mix, as long as the humidity and warmth are right – ideally about 18-20°C – and always wet but not swimming. Cover trays with a plastic bag or newspaper “tent” and water twice daily. In seven days they'll be like a lawn.

As soon as the seedlings are up and green, remove the bag and reduce watering to avoid fungal attack. Once there is a fairly full and even show of seedlings in the tray, liquid feed with a seaweed solution, which provides immediate vigour.

Once they've got four or five leaves, start transplanting. You'll probably get 2000 seedlings per tray. Visit Project Crimson's website if you want to donate any extras to a local project.

Geoff Canham, Pohutukawas a Plenty



Q **COLOUR CHANGE**
This summer my liliums are all orange, but last year they were rich, creamy colours – white, pink and soft pink. What has caused this? I feed them with cow or sheep manure and deadhead as needed.
 JANE WESTWOOD, AKAROA

A We asked Liz Brunsden from the mail order bulb and perennial supplier Garden Post for her expert opinion. Liz replied that she has heard of this happening and there are a few possible explanations.

A dominant gene from one parent of the original plant may have taken over and caused the plant to revert. Alternatively, new plants may have sprung up from sports but this is unlikely to have affected several bulbs.

Another possibility is that stray seedlings have grown up and replaced the original ones. Random scales or bulblets planted with the original bulbs may have reached flowering size for the first time this season. Seed from the previous year's flowers will contain the genes of those bulbs' parents so can result in quite different offspring.

Liz also warns against using fresh manures because the high nitrogen content can burn the bulbs, although she doesn't think that would affect the colour. Instead use a specialised bulb food with an NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) ratio of 5:4:5 plus trace elements.

Barbara Smith



Q MYSTERY PLANT
This perennial flowers for six weeks in midsummer and disappears in winter. In my dry, sunny garden the flowers reach 1m. In my daughter's shadier, irrigated garden it is much taller. What is it?
ANDREA WEBSTER, WARKWORTH

A Kate Jury from Seaflowery Nursery in Thames identified your plant as *Lysimachia ephemerum*, a type of loosestrife. The sage-green leaves form a tidy, upright clump and it isn't invasive. The tapering spires have many silvery-white flowers with a touch of mauve. Plant it at the back of a flower border or by the waterside. Bees love it and it is an excellent cut flower too.

Often called willow-leaved or silver loosestrife it is no relation to purple loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria*, which is a pest plant. (Read more at weedbusters.org.nz.)

Kate says it is reasonably easy to grow, but generally prefers a damp position, which would explain why the flower spikes are much taller in your daughter's garden. The fact that it also survives and flowers so beautifully in a sunny, drier spot, is testament to its tough nature.

The best time to divide this *lysimachia* is in early spring, just as new growth is beginning to show. The best time to purchase it is in late spring to early summer as potted ones tend to look straggly after flowering. Order from seaflowernursery.co.nz.

Barbara Smith



Q WEEDY GRASS
This rough paddock grass is spreading throughout my lawn. I've been lying on the lawn trying to pull it out. I would appreciate your advice on getting rid of it as simply and cheaply as possible.
GRAHAM BONE, GREYMOUTH

A The problem is summer grass (*Poa digitaria*). This grass is best dug out by hand as the use of weed killers will kill off any remaining grass.

Hydrocotyle and other weeds are present too. If you want a lush-bladed lawn, you'll need to spray it and start again. Hydrocotyle indicates poor soil and drainage, so apply granulated gypsum once the lawn has died off after spraying.

Autumn is the best time to sow a new lawn as it won't have to compete with weed growth and will establish before next summer.

Work the soil to a fine tilth and apply Burnet's Ezy Starter which contains all the nutrition (fertiliser, wetting agent, mini prilled gypsum and organic matter) you'll need. Choose the right seed for the conditions – Burnet's Wearwell if you want a hard-wearing family lawn, or Boston Green for a finer appearance.

Keep well-watered and mow once the lawn is 5-6cm high, only taking 1/3 of the growth at a time. In three months apply Burnet's EzyFert slow release fertiliser. After six months apply Burnet's EzyGreen Extra to weed, feed and condition all at the same time.

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KID PARADE



SOFIE BAXTER (2)

of Alexandra likes watching
bumble bees in the herb bed.



JIMMY WHITHAM (2)

from Christchurch munches a
big carrot down to the leaves.



SAMANTHA HARRISON (9)

sizes up the broad beans in
her Taupo garden.



WEI WEI ONG (6)

of New Plymouth loves picking
and eating strawberries.

SHOW TIME

Vege sculptures and sand saucers are firm favourites at A&P shows and harvest festivals – here's how to make your own

PLAYING WITH FOOD takes on a whole new meaning when it comes to dreaming up a creation that will wow the judges at your local show.

Plan ahead: Grow funky-shaped gourds and curly squash so you've got great material to work with. Scour the Kings Seeds catalogue for varieties such as 'Rampicante' and 'Long Ribbed' zucchini, 'Flying Saucer' squash or warty gourds and pumpkins of all sizes.

Older & wiser: Mature produce with tough skins will last longer, hold their shape and colour better on the show bench. Avoid soft, leafy greens – they'll wilt in minutes!

Remember the young ones: Immature pumpkins and squash, unlikely to ripen at the end of the season, can stand in for eyes and limbs (see photo, opposite).

Inside out: The contrasting colour inside a vegetable can be used as a design feature. A dark, glossy eggplant turns into a penguin when the white flesh is exposed.

Hunt for mutants: Now is the time for those stunted, twisted carrots and lumpy potatoes to have their moment of glory.

Power up: Pumpkins in particular can be tough to carve. Take to them with an angle grinder, drill or saw to make the initial cuts.

Read the rules: Some shows allow the use of artificial materials such as googly eyes, toys and other accessories; for others it is strictly plant material only.

Internal fortitude: Hold your creation together with bamboo or metal skewers – drill holes first if necessary.

Waste not, want not: Feed any leftovers to your worm farm or compost bin.

HOW TO MAKE A SAND SAUCER

Making a miniature garden or an intricate symmetrical pattern of flowers is not just for the show bench. It's an absorbing, fun activity for children (and their parents and grandparents too!).

Here's how to get started

Choose a container that is the right size for the project you have in mind and the age of the child. Allow for at least 2-3cm of sand to support the stems. It can take a surprisingly long time and a lot of material to cover the surface so a small bowl or saucer is ideal. Aluminium pie plates work well for a group of children and they can take their masterpieces home later.

Fill with damp sand either level or mounded at the centre and get decorating. A pencil or chopstick comes in handy to make holes for soft stems.

There's no limit to what you can use. Take a garden walk with the child and a pair of secateurs and see what you can find.

Try hydrangea and agapanthus florets, daisies, zinnias, echinacea, marigolds, brunfelsia, primula, manuka, wallflowers and nigella. Avoid thorns and sticky sap. Seed pods, berries and leaves are pretty too. Visit the herb garden for chive flowers and parsley seed heads. Add plastic animals, fairies, mini mirror ponds or even cars and dinosaurs as my sons did.



ETHAN RYAN (2)

takes a wheelbarrow ride in Nana's Manukau garden.

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Each photo published on these pages wins a pair of kids' gloves and a set of garden tools from Omni Products. Visit omniproducts.co.nz to see the full range. Send your photos to Kids' Mailbox, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or email your digital photographs (approximately 1MB in size) to mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz. Please make sure your child is looking at the camera and include his/her age and your postal address.



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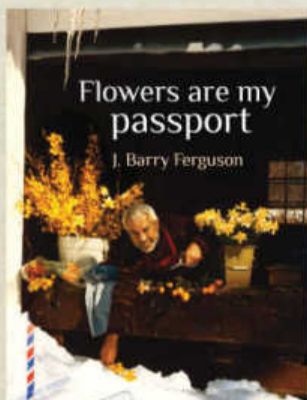
Bookshelf

Christine Rush reviews newly released
New Zealand gardening books



Flowers are my passport: *Chamaecyparis* *perfoliata*. *Bottom right*: *Samolus* *luteus* *'Vergilium'*. *Centre*: *Chamaecyparis* *'Juniper'*. *Top center*: *Chamaecyparis* *'Oak Island'*, and trunk of *Betula* *remota* *'Yellow'*.

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FLOWERS ARE MY PASSPORT

by J Barry Ferguson, available
on fishpond.com, \$50

I love memoirs. There's something so inspiring about people who have chosen the path less travelled, and J Barry Ferguson certainly forged a career far removed from his upbringing in Wellington and Dunedin. From his beginnings as a floral apprentice (with a

sideline in square dance calling!) to owning and marketing his first florist shop in Christchurch we learn that our hero has a knack for making friends, spotting an opportunity and making the most of his contacts to travel to far-flung corners of the globe, at one point even helping to run an English-language theatre company in Norway. He lands in New York in the 1960s, just as beau-

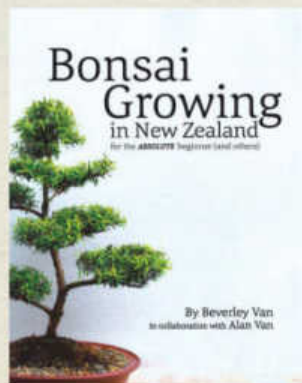
monde apartment dwellers are hankering for beautiful balcony gardens, and soon establishes himself about the smart set, socially and horticulturally. Trips to Asia reveal a passion for and deep knowledge of plants. Now ensconced north of Auckland, Barry looks back in endearing fashion on a life well lived. This is definitely a book to buy, borrow or beg your local library to stock. Highly recommended.



PARADISE THROUGH THE SEASONS

by Alan Trott, published by Trotts Garden Publishing, \$60

Subtitled "A Year in the Life of Trotts Garden", this is the second book by Alan Trott about the beautiful Ashburton property that he planned and created over many years. Now a NZ Gardens Trust Garden of International Significance, Alan describes in words and his own photos the amazing plants, trees and structures that make this a year-round destination. As the title suggests, it reveals how the garden changes over the course of a year, from the glorious colours and textures of spring, to the famed Red Border in summer, avenues aflame with autumn colour and scenes of knot gardens and ponds swathed in frost, mist and snow. (Read at the height of the Kiwi summer, I must confess to have gravitated towards the winter chapter.) Trotts Garden is a country garden par excellence and is a must-see if you're ever in the area and with this book, available via trotts.co.nz, you can visit without leaving home.



BONSAI GROWING IN NZ

by Beverley Van, distributed by nationwidebooks.co.nz, \$49.99

Beverley Van wrote this "so that people could have the pleasure of bonsai without the dismal failures I started off with. So many dead trees!" This excellent guide is full of detailed photos, trouble-shooting and suitable plants for beginners. We have 3 copies of this book to give away; enter at nzgardener.co.nz. Entries close March 27, 2016.

Events Guide

NORTH ISLAND

March

• Otari-Wilton's Bush: For the birds.

A celebration of light, flight and birdsong from the makers of 2014 Festival hit Power Plant. Walk-through art experience in the native forest of Otari-Wilton's Bush. For more details and to purchase tickets visit Festival.co.nz. **March 3-19**

• **Martinborough Fair.** New Zealand-made goods for sale. Martinborough Town Square. martinboroughfair.org.nz. **March 5**

• **Harbourview Sculpture Trail.** Harbourview Peoples Park, Te Atatu Peninsula, Auckland. Mon-Thu 10am-6pm, Fri-Sun. 10am-7.30pm. harbourviewsculpture.com.

March 5-28

• Introduction to Permaculture.

New course lead by Trish Allen. Matakana Hall, 43 Matakana Valley Rd, Matakana. 9am-4pm. \$160 per person. Harnessing permaculture principles as a design for living more sustainably. Course fee includes morning/afternoon teas and guided visits to permaculture properties. More info and bookings kaipatiki.org.nz/courses, 09 482 1172.

March 12-13

• North Shore Home & Garden Show.

North Shore Events Centre, off Porana Rd, Glenfield, Auckland. Fri Sat & Sun 10-5. Adult \$8, senior special Friday \$5, under 16 free. homeandgardenshow.co.nz.

March 18-20

• **Round the Vines.** Join the pre-harvest pilgrimage and celebrate another Martinborough vintage. Sign up to walk or run the 10 or 21 km routes. All welcome – families with prams, runners and walkers of all ages, individual entries or teams. Participants taste local wines, and are entertained by street bands and a parade of creative costumes. Fancy dress encouraged – prizes for best dressed teams and individuals. More information and registration at roundthevines.org.nz. **March 20**

• **Hamilton Autumn Orchid Show and Sale.** Orchid show, plant sales, commercial growers, potting, cultural notes, demonstrations. Hamilton Gardens Complex, Cobham Drive. 10.30am-4pm. Admission \$4. Ph 07 871 3721. **March 20**

April

• Taupo Home & Garden Show.

Great Lake Centre, Story Place, Taupo. Fri, Sat & Sun 10-5. Adult \$5, senior special Friday \$3, under 16 free. homeandgardenshow.co.nz.

April 1-3

SOUTH ISLAND

March

• Tai Tapu Sculpture Garden

exhibition. Work by leading sculptors. 199 Cossars Rd, RD2, Tai Tapu, Christchurch. 11am-3pm. 03 329 6662. taitapusculturegarden.co.nz.

March 5-6, 12-13, 19-20

• **Autumn Flower Show.** Presented by The Catlins Horticultural Society and Southland & Dunedin Dahlia Circles. Owaka Community Centre. 1.30-4.30pm. Adults \$3, children free. Contact Wendy DeBoer 03 415 8799. **March 12**

• Canterbury Dahlia Circle Show

and rose display. St Peter's Church Hall, Church Corner, Upper Riccarton. 1-4 p.m. Free admission. **March 12**

• Southern Jam Sessions with

Lynda Hallinan. Join our editor-at-large for an entertaining evening of growing, gathering and preserving. Nichol's Garden Centre, Dunedin (Tuesday), Nichol's Garden Centre, Cromwell (Wednesday) and Nichol's Garden Centre, Invercargill (Thursday). Event starts at 5.30pm. See nicholsgroup.co.nz. Bookings essential. **March 29-31**

April

• Ashburton Back to Basics Expo.

Learn about natural, sustainable, cost-effective living. 100 sites: bread making, fixing clothes, budgeting and growing food, recipes and tips. New Life Church, 58 Melcombe St, Ashburton. 11am-3pm. Free admission. Ph Katie 027 337 2571.

April 2

Free event listings.

Send your event details (at least 10 weeks ahead) to: Events Guide, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141; or email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz with "Event Listing" in the subject line.



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SHOWS

- **North Shore Home & Garden Show.** 18-20 March, North Shore Events Centre, off Porana Rd, Glenfield, Auckland. Fri, Sat & Sun 10-5. Adult \$8, senior special Friday \$5, under 16 free. www.homeandgardenshow.co.nz
- **Taupo Home & Garden Show.** 1-3 April, Great Lake Centre, Story Place, Taupo. Fri, Sat & Sun 10-5. Adult \$5, senior special Friday \$3, under 16 free. www.homeandgardenshow.co.nz

WEBSITES TO VISIT

- www.dahliahaven.co.nz
 - www.lavender.org.nz
- Find growers, products, useful information. New Zealand Lavender Growers' Association.

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- www.organicediblegarden.co.nz
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joe bennett

In which a new type of pun tickles his fancy, a hollyhock-clad cottage is fondly remembered, and the Mystery of Aunt Bea's dying words is finally revealed

Regular readers of this column will both be aware that I like a pun. In particular I enjoy a tale that's about as plausible as Donald Trump and that winds its way through 800 words before arriving at a version of some song title so contrived that the reader's groans can be heard in space. I did not invent this sort of pun and I am not alone in taking pleasure from it. The Irish writer Flann O'Brien was partial to it and every episode of a BBC radio programme called *My Word* ended with a pair of such puns.

What I didn't know, however, was that this sort of pun has a name. I only discovered it thanks to an email from the generous Aileen Hart of Havelock North. According to the good Ms Hart the thing's called a feghoot.

No, I didn't believe it either. So I Googled it. Feel free to do the same. I can't tell you how excited I was to see it on Wikipedia. It wasn't just the fact of adding to my vocabulary, though that is always a joy. It was the promise that here at last might be a solution to a long-standing Bennett family mystery: the Mystery of Aunt Bea.

They don't make them like Aunt Bea any more. Everything about her was quaint. She brewed Lady Grey tea in a quaint old tea pot and poured it into quaint china cups. She owned a quaint little cottage with so many hollyhocks at the door that she hung a machete on the jamb for the convenience of visitors, and she shared that quaint little cottage in the quaintest possible way with her Japanese housekeeper Shoo.

Shoo was not in the least quaint. Indeed, Shoo had briefly chased the dream of the women's professional sumo wrestling circuit, but had been so heavily defeated in the Honshu Regional Finals that she was overcome with shame and felt obliged to leave Japan. A dozen years she travelled, doing anything she could to keep her soul and considerable body together. She welded boilers in Bombay, fixed forklifts in the Falklands. But eventually she fetched up in New Zealand, and one Wednesday while going door to door in search of casual heavy engineering jobs, she parted Bea's hollyhocks and raised the quaint brass

knocker. When Bea opened the door Shoo bowed low. Bea stood open-mouthed. Shoo stood back up, their eyes met and that was that. She was Aunt Bea's housekeeper from then on in, immovable as the rock of ages.

Thirty-three happy years later Aunt Bea bent to lift and divide a clump of verbenas at the foot of her hollyhocks, gasped, clutched her chest, fell, rolled and lay across her own lintel as still as any stone. And it was thus that Shoo found her some minutes later when taking a break from hewing granite out back. She swept Bea up in her mighty arms then rang the family. I recall the call still.

"Bea she die," snuffled Shoo, and put the phone down. My sister and I were there within the hour. It was an affecting scene. Bea lay tiny and shrivelled on her quaint little bed with its candlewick counterpane. Beside her sat the hunched figure of Shoo holding Bea's almost lifeless hand in her own huge paw and stroking it.

"Bea," said Shoo, "niece and nephew here."

Bea opened her eyes. "You'll be after my feghoot," she said in a voice remarkably clear and strong.

I glanced at my sister, who shrugged.

"We're after nothing, dear Bea," said my sister.

"We just..."

"Ask Shoo," said Bea, and she tried to sit up but she fell back on the pillow, fluttered her eyelids and left this world as quaintly as any one ever did. Shoo wailed so loud that a Meissen shepherdess fell from the mantelpiece and shattered.

The will left everything to Shoo and made no reference to any feghoot. My sister and I agreed it had merely been the rambling of a fading mind. Until, that is, the email arrived from the good Ms Hart. I rang my sister immediately who was piqued by the news and rang Shoo.

"Come New Year Eve," said Shoo.

I had a prior engagement but my sister went and promised to ring me if she discovered anything. Smack on midnight my phone rang.

"Well?" I exclaimed.

There was a pause, then my sister started to sing in her pleasant baritone. "Shoo told our quaint Aunt Bea's feghoot." ❖





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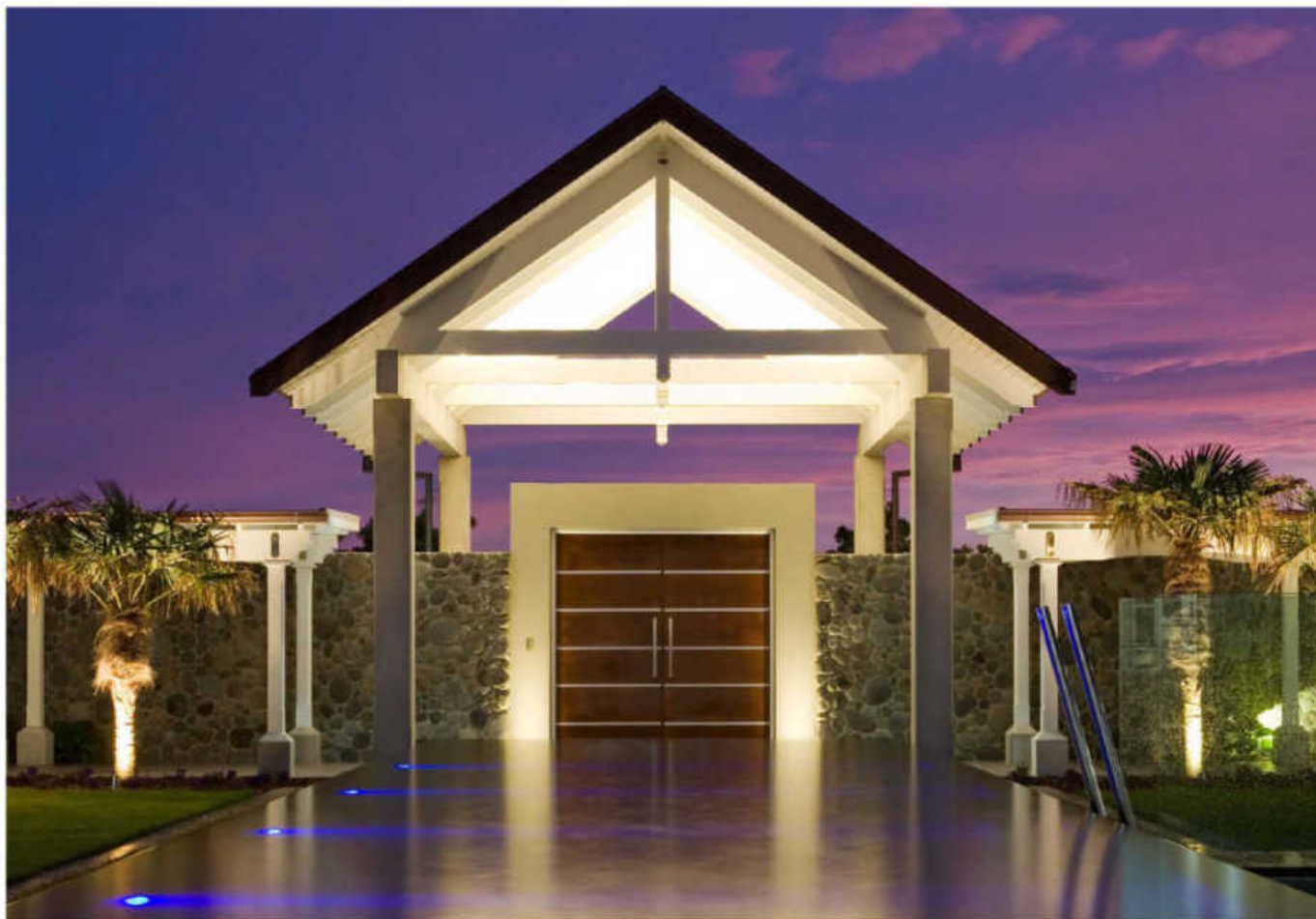
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